



Cracked Ice or Jewels of the Forbidden Skates at Performance Space 122

Reviewed by Adam R. Perlman
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Photo by Karl Grant

Jennifer Miller

Where scientists and holy men have failed, send in the clowns. It's circus folk who have at last mastered alchemy. If you don't believe me, check out *Cracked Ice or Jewels of the Forbidden Skates*, in which a bunch of local carnies have taken mediocre tricks, bad jokes, and a thoroughly unnecessary plot and turned them into a rather charming evening.

Cracked Ice is primarily the work of writer-director-star **Jennifer Miller**. She's one of those downtown performers I'd shamefully never seen before—and will now never forget. This isn't because she's a bearded lady. Well, not just because. True, there is something remarkable about authentically feminine gestures wed to a puss that looks like my rabbi's, but Miller is a sly and joyful performer.

Her primary job is proprietor of Circus Amok, and here, perhaps because she's received Performance Space 122's Ethyl Eichelberger Award, she's assembled a number of her circus cohorts and other old friends into a loosely connected theatre piece. The story: One of the acts that plays the Rhinestone Cabaret, the Liberty Sisters—consisting of Sybil (Miller) and Statua (Carlton Cyrus Ward)—has been victimized by that scoundrel **Bernie Madoff**. They want their money back—or at least revenge—and their quest ropes in Madoff's sons (the Wau Wau Sisters, aka Adrienne Truscott and Tanya Gagné). For reasons of general silliness, Madoff (Rae C. Wright) has a couple of secret identities: Tom and Bernadette.

The book scenes—both those written by Miller and those by Deb Margolin, who handles the Madoff material—play slowly and are a bit boring. In a vaudeville, a

little plot goes a long way. Apart from Miller and Wright, the cast really isn't up to acting, so less of that would have been more. But the Rhinestone Cabaret performances, even when not terribly adept, are largely disarming. I loved the combo of juggling and bad Bush jokes (culled from Leno) and an accordion number with Novice Theory (aka Geo Wyeth) banging out his own Tom Waits-ish tune.

The piece's effect largely owes to its affect. Eschewing high-sheen seriousness and cliquy standoffishness, *Cracked Ice* is a celebration. It's a collection of freaks and geeks having and sharing a good time. If it's not a particularly well-made piece of theatre, it is a well-made advertisement for Miller and Circus Amok.

Presented by and at Performance Space 122,

150 First Ave., NYC.

April 25–May 10. Wed.–Sun., 8 p.m. (Additional performance Sat., May 9, 11 p.m.)

(212) 352-3101, (866) 811-4111, www.theatermania.com, or www.ps122.org.

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