

Press Dossier

Everybody Knows This is Nowhere

Review: 'Everybody Knows This is Nowhere' picks right up where 'Sometime' left off



Photo By: Kelsey Miller

CALGARY — What do you get when you cross Nietzsche with Lana Del Rey? Horrifying mental images of a German philosopher in a cocktail dress aside, you get the debut of Theatre Junction's newest hit production on the rise, *Everybody Knows This is Nowhere*. Courtesy of Theatre Junction's artist direction, Mark "Cat Brain" Lawes and the same fine and friendly folks that brought us 2013's *Sometime Between Now* and *When the Sun Goes Supernova*, *Nowhere* is the long-awaited follow-up that picks up on the same dusty trail that it left us at the conclusion of their last production, resuming a long and twisted narrative about the American Dream gone wrong.

While the last production was chiefly based on Marshall McLuhan's epic tome on media and culture, *Medium is the Message*, *Nowhere* has a familiar tone, though different source materials for inspiration. Drawing on Lana Del Rey's innate ability to find beauty and feeling at the bottom of the

bin of pop culture remnants, as well as Nietzsche nihilistic superpowers, *Nowhere* quickly opens in an apocalyptic desert wasteland. The narrative suggests the weight of the western world had somehow crumbled, leaving behind it a carnage of plastic shards of a once great civilization and the broken dreams and people that have been left in the wake of the tidal wave of its demise.

Standing naked and dimly lit, we find three such survivors trying to piece together their identities and make sense of everything that had brought them to this point. Through a series of manic and dreamlike vignettes, we are shown the stories of these three trying to make sense of themselves and their new world. Interpretive modern dance, projections, and music all lend a hand in helping draw out the emotions of the audience as they explore the oh-so relatable ideas of isolationist culture fighting against in-born human animalistic instinct.

Returning from the previous production, we find a familiar cast of characters to lead us along the twisted narrative, including co-writer and dramaturge Raphaële Thiriet, the charming and handsome Luc Bouchard-Boissonault, the always bouncy and vibrant Melina Stinson, as well as the addition of troubadour in the wings, Arran Fisher as the musical accompaniment for the evening. Overlaid by haunting footage, courtesy of filmmaker Kyle Thomas, the production leaves you with the feeling of being in a twisted and frightening dream world where all of our existential nightmares have come to life.

If you're bummed about missing out on what could easily be called the highlight of the theatre season in Calgary and the headline of Theatre Junction's killer line-up this year, all hope is not lost. If you happen to find yourself in Montreal, the production will also be showing at the Théâtre Aux Écuries in November and will hopefully be shown for another run in Calgary, as the last production was to help out those folks that missed it the first time around.

Max Maxwell / Beatroute

A Beautiful Refrain Against a Post Apocalyptic Backdrop



Raphaële Thiriet is mesmerizing in Mark Lawes and Theatre Junction's Company of Artists newest creation - Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere, running until March 7 at Theatre Junction GRAND Photo By: Kelsey Miller

CALGARY - A desolate stage is set - a marquee M, blinking and sinking in the corner, strings of lights overhead, a large fading billboard and, barely visible and easily missed, a dressing table hidden in the corner. And sand - lots and lots of sand.

Out struts a well dressed man. He has everything he needs. This is his refrain in the opening monologue. But, as the stage goes dark and movement becomes key, it's apparent that this is no longer a time of plenty, but a not-so-far-flung future where loss and sadness are more abundant than well tailored suits and Cadillac Escalades.

This is Theatre Junction's second work in their Supernova saga, Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere - a contemporary mix of theatre, performance, pop music, and vid-

eo installation telling a fractured story.

The piece was dark and ominous but didn't take itself too seriously, keeping the audience ever-so-slightly off balance the entire 90 minutes. Was this the feverish nightmare of a man who once had everything he needed or a look into a not-so-distant possible future?

Touches of vintage are sprinkled throughout the show - 50s melodies sung against a red velvet curtain next to a 90s ascetic with a dash of 60s go-go and Russ Meyer madness thrown in. Without the diary dates to tell us what we are watching is in the near future, it would be impossible to pick a time or place. This adds nicely to that sense of bewilderment and angst

stewing in the audience.

Nowhere is a feast for the senses. Mark Lawes and Theatre Junction's Company of Artists certainly know how to use an ascetic to push boundaries and this is no different.

Beautiful, haunting and feverish, Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere is the type of well-rounded, mixed media production that leeches into your subconscious and keeps your brain humming for days after the final bows are taken.

Amy Jo Espetveidt/ CIA

Theatre Junction seeks out the road that leads to the end of the (natural) world

Somewhere at the crossroads of global warming and big box stores lies the blueprint for Everybody Knows This is Nowhere.

That's the title - inspired by a Neil Young song about the collapse of the American Dream - of the latest performance creation from Theatre Junction's Resident Company of Artists, which closed Saturday.

It's a funny, smart exploration into a near future, where everywhere is the beach without much in the way of water to dip your toes in.

Instead, there's a searing heat, that we receive, read in periodic narrated journal entries - from a narrator (Luc Bouchard-Boissonneault) - as dispatches from the near-future, when the thermometer regularly tops 40 degrees on a set (designed by Theatre Junction artistic director Mark Lawes, with lights from Scott Reid) awash in sand.

For relief, there's a (blank) billboard that delivers treasured shade and also serves as a makeshift screen for the home movies of the trio of castmembers (Bouchard-Boissonneault, Raphael Thiriet and Melina Stinson) who appear to be the last people on earth.

Bouchard-Boissonneault opens the show with a spoken word piece about a guy who keeps chanting "I have everything I need," then lists the number of pairs of shoes, jackets, flatscreens, rides, and all the rooms he has in his gigantic McMansion where he amuses himself to no real end.

In another scene, Thiriet's character stands over Bouchard-Boissonneault repeating the



Photo By: Kelsey Miller

phrase, "Talk to me" over and over again, lending a ghostly presence to the somewhat emotionally absent Bouchard-Boissonneault.

There's lots of technology in Everybody Knows This is Nowhere, but what sets the multi-media apart in this one is that it's decidedly low-fi in nature.

The grainy, 1970's-style projected images (from video designer Kyle Thomas) appear to come from a 16 mm. movie projector projecting memories of a time when the planet functioned.

The mic that Bouchard-Boissonneault brandishes looks straight out of a Sinatra concert film from the 1940's, while Thiriet's cabaret solos - she stands atop the billboard, with a backdrop of red curtain, looking a little like Isabella Rossellini in Blue Velvet - conjur up long-ago, romantic eras more so than the 21st century filled with selfies and Apple products.

There's also dance, with Bouchard-

Boissonneault and Stinson delivering an electric moment that pulls the show out of the smirky slumber it occasionally sinks into.

Out of nowhere, the trio break into a rendition of You've Lost That Loving Feeling, that Everly Brothers classic, and it's sweetly funny and romantic.

These Theatre Junction shows drive a lot of people crazy, with their non-narratives, and Everybody Knows This is Nowhere surely fits into that unique mashup of what has come to be known as post-dramatic theatre.

Watching it, with its unique blend of video, dance, spoken word, and some nice live guitar (from Arran Fisher), I realized that it's just as much a live art installation as a piece of staged theatre. It's almost as if you took one of DaveandJenn's richly evocative paintings and brought it to life, it would look, and sound a little like this show.

And although Lawes and Thiriet cite Nietzsche and bluesy pop diva Lana Del Rey as two of their major influences, it's also filled with allusions to, and a sensibility that reflects its Western-Canadian origins, in a French intellectual Montreal artist-in-residence kind of way – and what could be more made-in-Canada than that?

It's the sort of show you can, as an audience member, feel permission to check in and out of from time to time. The pleasure of Everybody Knows This is Nowhere is that, as a piece of Post-Attention Span Theatre, checking back in produces a uniquely Theatre Junction brand of payoff.

Everybody Knows This is Nowhere

Closed March 9 at Theatre Junction Grand

theatrejunction.com

Three and a half stars

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Stephen Hunt/ Calgary Herald