

Theatre Reviews by Dennis Sparks

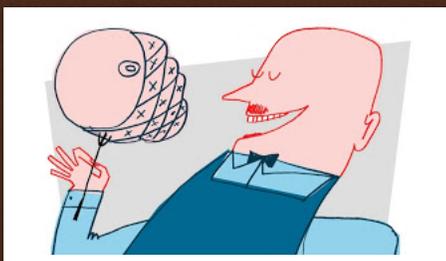
Theatre Reviews in Portland and Ashland Oregon

Dennis Sparks, with over 40 years of experience in performing arts as actor, director, and producer, reviews theatre and films productions.

Monday, January 14, 2013

I Love To Eat—Portland Center Stage—Portland, OR

A Epicurean Delight



This one-man show about chef, James Beard (Rob Nagle), is written by James Still and directed by Jessica Kubzansky. It plays at PCS through February 3rd. PCS is located in the Pearl district at 128 NW 11th Ave. For more information on this show and their season, go to www.pcs.org or call 503-445-3700.

Take a large dose of laughter, sprinkle in dreams of being Chinese, add two tablespoons of classical opera, pepper generously with being openly gay and what do you get?! A wonderful concoction called James Beard, chef extraordinaire. This Portland native went onto become one of the best-known chefs in the world and the first to have his own televised cooking shows, back in the mid-1940's, and the creator

of over 20 cook books.

This one-man show about Beard (Rob Nagle) consists of this eccentric, rotund, personage telling us, in short snippets, the story of his life. He re-creates his cooking show for Borden's, with his co-host, a hand-held puppet of their symbol, Elsie, the cow. He explains about his humble beginnings in his parents' boarding house in Portland and his first fascination with cooking from their Chinese cook (and his Godfather). He brags that he never had a cooking lesson in his life and that making good meals need not be just for the rich and fancy of our world.

His orations are constantly interrupted by phone calls from various friends, lovers and strangers, as he insists that his phone number be listed and that he enjoys being able to salvage mealtime accidents. He occasionally slips into a semi-coma when he hears classical opera and concedes that his real calling was to be a great singer of it. Then he whips up a tasty, simple, homemade sandwich that he shares with some of the audience. But, through all the joy, he confesses to never really being loved. Being content is not the same as being happy, he surmises.

The set (Tom Buderwitz) is Beard's kitchen in his home. It is colorfully decorated and allows for an easy flow of movement. The direction (Ms. Kubzansky) lets the actor explore the space and keeps the action moving at all times. When needed, she allows the pace to slow for his more poignant memories and then clips along, when necessary, for his more joyous escapades.

But the script, although good, could easily sink, if the Beard role was not in capable hands. In PSC's case, Mr. Nagle is not only capable but exceeds all expectations! He truly inhabits the role. He has the physical look, the mannerisms and voice and, most of all, portrays the heart and soul of Mr. Beard. He literally has the audience in the palm of his hand, to mold whatever feast he chooses. He plays the quiet moments with as much passion and meaning as the more bombastic ones. I couldn't imagine this journey without Mr. Nagle at the helm. Or, perhaps to summarize it in Mr. Beard's own words: "Goody, Goody!"

It should be noted that, until recently, there is no permanent tribute in Portland to this native son. The oversight has been rectified recently, as there will be a James Beard Public Market near the Morrison Bridge, sometime in the near future. If you choose to experience this exciting performance, tell them Dennis sent you.

Posted by Dennis Sparks at 4:53 PM