

07.22.09

### **Review of "3!" : NY Theatre.com**

Review of "3!", a multimedia experiment based on Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1971 film "The Third Generation". Awarded the prize for best production of the 2009 undergroundzero festival.

3!

reviewed by E. Michael Lockley

3! at PS122 is a rare theatrical experience that utilizes multimedia to the max and stirs its audience with a complex plot, dynamic actors, and an overwhelming set. The play has already started once the audience arrives. We walk in and encounter all of the actors on stage, occupied in character. Meanwhile the set includes mirrors, mannequins, a couch (there might have been another), camera and boom mic operators who end up drawing our attention from scene to scene, tape players, TVs, desks, tables, books, a bathroom (utilized by characters in multiple ways during the show), telephones, and one huge screen center stage, and two others on the left and right sides. The play starts and interrupts the "turn your cell phones off" announcement. As the pre-show announcement is being given, a man approaches the audience very upset, speaking a foreign language, and soon pulls out a gun. The play starts off jarringly, you don't quite get all of what is happening, but you know that someone is very upset and we as the audience have a visceral response.

Much of the play is like this. Things just start and with all of the characters remaining on stage, and a movie playing on a TV, and music lightly playing as underscore; you might not catch every line in the scene and you will not be able to see everything that's happening on stage, but you absolutely feel a response. So initially it takes some time for the audience to catch up to the play's pace, but once we do, we realize that the characters are a group of young revolutionists in Berlin who are using terrorism to bring down the system. This is the primary goal of most of the 14 characters in the show; however their personal turmoil within themselves and their relationships with each other prove to be more daunting than their collective task. From domestic abuse to drug addiction, cross-dressing to eating disorders, and a decent amount of sexual violence, the characters struggle to live a peaceful existence despite their desire to bring down the aristocrats. Their rage, their distance, their pain, and their addictions are their own problems, and despite their attempt to unite in the name of revolution, at moments it feels like their individual gratuitous acts will keep them just where they are. A "cause" is wasted on these young people whose ultimate obsessions are sex, drugs, looks, relationships, music, and having a good time.

Now you may notice that I haven't included character names. Well there aren't any "main characters" to focus on. From actors playing multiple characters, to the fact that each individual's story is given pretty equal stage time, the story is not about a single person or relationship, but rather a narrative of the whole community. This style of storytelling is assisted by the multimedia aspect of the production. You are able to see, whether on camera or on stage, what other characters are doing. And the multimedia also isn't just to be "cool" and "innovative." It becomes clear that the director wants to make a statement with her choices. Within the two hours Doris Mirescu's masterful concept and direction allows for the play to comment on media, voyeurism, terrorism, surveillance, and ultimately comment on the medium of film as a record of history and melodrama as reality.

The actors are fully committed and attack each moment with a sense of urgency and deep need. From screams to whispers, the acting is very focused despite the cameras, microphones, lights, wires, and screens that they constantly have to consider. At moments throughout, the characters push a mic aside or suggest a cameraman get out of his or her way. Challenges, such as an alarm clock set to go off at set increments throughout the show, keep the actors on their toes, ready for anything to happen. The fun and

genuine trepidation of trying to act out some very violent, sexual, and disturbing scenes allow for an audience to experience danger without feeling threatened. The actors have incredible control despite their out-of-control characters.

Writer/director Rainer Fassbinder's film *The Third Generation* inspired Doris Mirescu's epic theatrical experiment *3!* But prior to seeing Mirescu's production I knew little about Fassbinder, an eccentric, controversial German filmmaker recognized for his brand of "intelligent social melodramas." After researching *The Third Generation* I realized that *3!* follows the same storyline, so if there is any confusion before or afterwards one can certainly research that film. But even without this knowledge I found *3!* engaging, disturbing, shocking, relevant, and enigmatic. It is a theatrical experience unlike any other. Because of its unconventional format, its engaging stories, and striking performances, I see myself thinking about it for years to come.

Producer: Dangerous Ground

Conceived & Directed By: Doris Mirescu