

The Love Project

Reprint

blog post

7 Stages' Love Project showcases two for the road
March 4, 2009 at 9:15 am by Curt Holman in
A&E, Events

In 7 Stages' The Love Project, Rhodessa Jones and Idris Ackamoor bring their considerable talents to explore that many-splendored thing that makes the world go 'round. Love is an impossibly broad subject — it's like devoting a show to everything and nothing — but Jones and Ackamoor prove to be such consummate entertainers that they can delight audiences no matter what their ostensible theme may be.



Co-artistic directors of the San Francisco performance company Cultural Odyssey, Jones and Ackamoor wrote The Love Project with Atlanta's Pearl Cleage and Zaron Burnett. Dancers Dezrica "Star" Murry and Millicent Johnnie occasionally provide hip-swaying accompaniment. Directed by Harriet Schiffer-Scott, the show offers a cabaret-style variety of songs, stories and set pieces, beginning with a spoken-word poem about "love in a time of war," and how people should cling to each other, romantically and otherwise, at a time of national turmoil. The introductory piece feels more written and less spontaneous than the rest of the show. The segment's evocations of Gaza and Iraq, while hardly out of date, make The Love Project initially seem less timely than it actually is.

When Jones riffs lustily on Barack and Michelle Obama's first night in the White House, however, The Love Project proves fresh and funny. Jones croons and scats jazz tunes but turns out to be a born raconteur, chatting up the audience, recounting tense stories of life on the road and celebrating sensuality. (The name of her one-woman show, Hot Flashes, Power Surges & Private Summers, presented at 7 Stages in 2000, hints at her cheerful, frank attitude about sexuality.) She's the kind of force-of-nature performer who can get audiences to stand up and sing love songs, even at an afternoon show.

Ackamoor complements her as the quintessential "cool cat," a jazz man in resplendent red or green zoot suits. He's not just an impressive saxophone soloist, freestyling energetically and sustaining notes to impressive lengths, he can tap dance while playing. If you saw him busking, you'd empty your wallet. He's also a pianist, guitarist, percussionist and cook, and offers a segment called "The Taste of Love" in which he discusses food and romance's relationship while preparing some vegetarian dishes for the audience. This particular piece, however pleasant, feels slightly drawn out, until it seems less like a metaphor and more like a cooking demo.

Close to the end of The Love Project, Jones and Ackamoor reveal that though they used to be a romantic couple, now they're strictly best friends and creative partners. Perhaps that detail should come closer to the top, since it feels more like an unnecessary complication near the conclusion. The Love Project takes an unexpected turn with its final piece, a jungle-themed musical number with elements of beat poetry about young people at risk. The grim implications mark a sharp change in tone

following the previous fun and games, but The Love Project ultimately suggests that the bonds of shared humanity may transcend the relationship between just two people.

The Love Project Through March 8. \$10-\$20. Thurs. -Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 5 p.m. (for additional performances, see website). 7 Stages, 1105 Euclid Ave. 404-523-7647. www.7stages.org.

Cultural Odyssey gratefully acknowledges the following for their support:

THE GROUSBECK FAMILY FOUNDATION

THE WILLIAM AND FLORA HEWLETT FOUNDATION

THE LIA FUND



THE SAN FRANCISCO FOUNDATION

The Community Foundation of the Bay Area