

I Kant

by Mary Polito

Steady Harper is a woman who has been exploring opportunities in Peterborough theatre for several years and the payoff for audiences has been rich.

I remember first seeing her in several of Robert Winslow's popular weekly improvisational "soaps." She displayed, then, a brilliant comedic sense, developing a variety of memorable characters from scratch.

Recently, Steady created the role of Mary Osborne in 4th Line Theatre's *The Great Farini*. Mary Osborne was a woman from Port Hope who lived in the mid-nineteenth century and travelled to Paris on her own to become a world renowned trapeze artist. While the role was sadly underwritten (upstaged by "Farini," another Port Hope native who left town for highwire fame), Steady gave the character spunk, charm and dignity.

To prepare for the role, she studied trapeze with circus artists and she continues these studies (while taking Trent Cultural Studies courses).

It is the tension between the intellectual and the artistic exercise that Steady has used to conceive the piece *I Kant* which she developed and performed with dancer, choreographer, Stephanie Corrin, as part of *Emergency #3*—the dance/movement fest held at Market Hall last weekend.

Taped male voices discussing Kant's notions about "aesthetic judgement" drone above interesting and thoughtful live music provided by Aaron Cavan and Parijat Charbonneau.

The women explore various dance moves—some traditionally associated with women performing for the erotic pleasure of men—and they send this bump and grind up hilariously.

Martha Cockshutt's costumes are definitely an integral part of the act—leather bras with tassels at the nipples and bottoms with a cut out see-through section at crotch-level. Woman as erotic object shifts into woman as

aesthetic object as the women take turns mounting the trapeze and then perform on it together moves of considerable skill and grace. The finale sees Stephanie on the trapeze and Steady saddled on a spinning rope.

The concept is wonderful and it is realized imaginatively.

If I had any complaint, I would just say go further with the conflict between the voices and the action—begin with the taped discussion well established before the entrance of the performers, disrupt it, overpower it. And pump up the burlesque and the hint of homoeroticism and make more of the sharp contrast with the breathtaking trapeze moves and the stunning images created in the air.

Steady says her motivation for developing the piece is her ongoing frustration with an imbalance in her Cultural Studies program—too much having to sit with "the boys" and talk about "the boys"—Kant et al., (I knew someone who used to call this the problem of the "cult studs") and not enough opportunity to develop ideas through studio work.

I'd say from watching this piece that Steady has plenty of important things to say. The riskiness of the trapeze is a great literalization of the risk that many women feel they are taking when they enter a certain kind of philosophical discourse in which they have previously been the objects of knowledge and now want to be agents of abstraction.

She says the danger the audience perceives as they watch the trapeze artist is mostly illusory—how can these "babes" hang smiling, suspended by a turn of the hip, hands and feet posed gracefully in the air, magically close to death?

The art defies reason, inspires terror, calls to an experience of rather Kantian sublime, I'd say.

Steady and Stephanie have appropriated both performance space and intellectual territory and have written with their bodies an engaging and convincing treatise.

