



Digging Below the Surface: *damned be this transmigration*

Kate Story grew up with 1920s newspaper funny man Don Marquis' writings and drawings and has wanted to create a performance about his life and work for the past two decades. After a first incarnation at the Theatre on King – *damned be this transmigration* is set to hit the Market Hall stage the first week of March.

"I'll say that dance is a failure," Story yells to her fellow actors, half smiling, as Story, Brad Brackenridge, and Ryan Kerr pick apart the cabaret style trio they've just stumbled through.

"It's a work in progress!" calls stage manager and lighting operator Lindsay Unterlander from halfway up the empty Market Hall seats.

Unlike the intimate Theatre on King, in Market Hall the cast of *damned be this transmigration* has space to move, so the cast is working diligently to get the spacing and timing of the newly imagined work down.

I'm sitting in on a rehearsal in Market Hall. Opening night is weeks away and the actors are currently running through the choreography for a series of dance routines spread throughout the production.

Even in this rehearsal stage the work is completely absorbing. There is an old typewriter in the corner of the stage and an empty bottle of booze to symbolize the main features of Marquis' working life.



Sitting in on a rehearsal is always a strange experience. It's a bit like poking your head into someone's closet when you've been invited over for dinner, or peeking into their

bedroom, you never know what you're going to see, but you know you're not really supposed to be looking.

This show is composed of local creative powerhouses. While Story is the writer and choreographer, local musical tour de force Rob Fortin composed all the original songs. Fortin sits in the upper right corner of the stage with a four-piece band including his partner in music and life and fellow Dora award winner Susan Newman on vocals, their son Dan Fortin on bass, and Bennett Bedoukian on drums. Previously directed by Em Glasspool, *dammned be this transmigration* is currently under the direction of New Stages' Randy Read.

The original music, inspired by the music of Marquis' day is so charming and catching three days later I still can't get the songs out of my head.

Unlike the actors huffing and puffing to nail down the last dance step or the next line, the musicians seem relaxed – concerned primarily with their timing. Rehearsal is an ongoing conversation between the musicians and actors that's remarkable to watch. Rather than the musicians curtailing or extending the songs to support the various dance routines, what we have here is a two way street of compromise, with counts of choreography being dropped to better work within the structure of the music and vice versa - a bargaining act-collaboration in its truest sense.



In many ways *dammned be this transmigration* is like the town of Peterborough itself – delightful at first glance, but bearing some deeper and darker truths the closer you look.

Amid its funny one-liners, quick-step choreography, and lilting notes *dammned be this transmigration* asks us some difficult questions. What is the role of the artist in society? Are artists being compensated fairly for the value they bring to our communities?

Writers like Marquis, who were deemed successes in their own time, struggled in poverty for most of their lives; *dammned be this transmigration* forces us to ask, almost a hundred years later, are conditions any different?