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Fantastic 'Oyster' worth savoring

By the end of Inbal Pinto & Avashalom Pollack's ingenious Spoleto production of "Oyster," it is hard to distinguish between what is absurd and what is normal. The vision of the two artists is truly original and results in delightful whimsy that has multiple layers of emotion and subtext.

An hour-long show includes a series of vignettes that resemble circus performers and sideshow freaks who entertain and interact with moments of mime, modern dance, contortion and theater. Though it first seems that there is no narrative, there are indeed emotional themes that develop as characters exhibit violence, fear and love.

The array of costumes and props creates a landscape with trap doors and stages within the stage reminiscent of Tim Burton and Dr. Seuss.

The action is emceed by frightening Siamese twins, a circus dancer with a seat on her rear and a ghoulish maid. Different groups take the stage.

At times there are women who appear to be self-manipulated marionettes, at other times a group of clowns dance with gesture and shape that creates an intriguing and surreal effect.

Trapeze performers hang on their ropes, flying and bouncing to the sound of chiming bells. Are these people trapped in their fun house world or are they simply performers?

There are degrees of strangeness, and just when you think you understand it, there is something more that moves from the clever to curious.

The dancers are wonderful to watch and what was at first bizarre becomes beautiful by the end. The audience showed its delight for this compelling production with a standing ovation.

Eliza Ingle