

MELTDOWN

By Marcy Arlin-Aboumajd

Amid the phantasmagoria of Coney Island, on the boardwalk at W.12th Street, is the Side Show Museum, a testament to the canny atmosphere of the amusement park's past. Located next to a hot dog and beer vendor, the museum pays homage to the paraphernalia and people of the rides and sideshows. It also houses a well-designed, charming theatre space run by Sideshows by the Seashore, under the artistic direction of Dick Zigun. The theater is decorated with sideshow posters, funhouse decorations and photographs of turn-of-the-century fun-seekers. In full view of the audience, these artifacts necessarily become part of any performance.

On a hot Friday evening, Meltdown Performing arts presented "Meltdown Music," performed by the Multiple Trouble Orchestra. Meltdown is a theater group whose elements include experimental music, performance art, clowning, new wave songs, dance, multi-media, stand-up comedy, with a heavy dose of dadaism. Founded in 1983, the group is based in Brooklyn and performs all around the New York area, has been on television and has a record production company. The show Friday night was part of a series of avant-garde theater and music events at the museum.

Officially the show began at 8pm, but the audience drifted in and out throughout the 2-hour performance. Some seemed to have come specifically for Meltdown; others seemed to have wandered in after a day at the beach. The performance echoed the informality of the audience: Cast members wandered around the stage area, chatting with friends, each other, arranging props, tuning electronic equipment, chocking the audio levels, accustoming themselves to the space, easing into the performance along with the audience—what I call "tuning up", an exercise normally done before the arrival of the

audience, all done in real time with little theatricality.

Things seemed to be getting started when one of the actors, (Bronwyn Rucker) dressed in a "ladylike" costume, began arranging salad ingredients on a table near the first row of bleachers. This salad at first seemed to be for the audience, maybe after the show, (no intermission) but she massacred the ingredients and no one wanted any.

Next, a capod, buffalo-skin/plastic hanger-capped man (Rick Russo) began reading, while seated on a second stage level, what turned out to be fortune cookie messages, picked at random from a basket. The trite words of wisdom became, because of the slow, methodical, repetitive delivery, profound, silly truths. Meanwhile, one by one, the musicians came on stage, sometimes accompanied by the Lady. They fiddled with their instruments, walked off, drank coke, chatted with friends in the audience. The Lady walked around the stage, passed a Barbie Doll-like pink hairbrush through her hair, and commented self-consciously on what she was doing. The evening came into focus with the performance of songs written by Ms. Rucker with Woody Reagan and Bob Goldberg, interspersed by musical riffs by one or more of the musicians.

The feeling of the evening fluctuated between relaxed, almost throw-away improvisation and heavily rehearsed musical presentations. Unfortunately, this reviewer became a bit dazed and impatient with the spaces between the musical numbers which seemed, after the first 20 minutes or so, irrelevant to the main thrust of the show: Clever, hyper-aware, post-nuclear, angst-ridden tunes. Although the intervals became shorter, after an hour and a half of interludes of "dead-space," impatience set in. Perhaps a more condensed manner of introducing the "characters" and songs and providing seques could be found,

especially in 90 degree heat.

But the songs themselves were wonderful! Instrumentation was by: Bill Andrejko, fretless bass; Bob Goldberg, keyboards, guitar; Ted Goldberg, electric clarinet; David Hollander, alto sax; and Bronwyn Rucker's vocals. Rick Russo also played the drums. The theme of the evening, to my perception, was the trickle-down effect of the fears of nuclear meltdown that plays on the sensibilities, relationships, concerns and identities of the average American artist/person. Ms. Rucker, in a self-conscious parody of herself as performer, presented several songs which might be variously called (no program notes) Meltdown I, II, and III, Imagining the City, King Kong Karen, (about a tough NY woman) Radical Action, TV Dreams. With a definite bias against nuclears, a meltdown could in fact have to do with reactors, (engineering designs on the program) summer-heat induced listlessness, relationship burn-out or despair. Anarchy was also mentioned as a possibility. One song was particularly funny when Ms. Rucker declaimed all the things she was sorry for, from nuclear missiles to eating a tasteless sandwich. Flicking a bo, reluctantly accepting applause, deadly earnest, (maybe) these songs gave us an alarming, fascinating and pertinent analysis of the neuroses that fill the nuclear age.

Unfortunately, I had to leave before the conclusion of the performance, due to a combination of the heat, the noise level, (the group occasionally broke into "random noise breaks") and stimuli what was used to be classified as "an experience": Coney Island craziness, seagulls and beach, funhouse atmosphere of the theater, and the somewhat overtly political post-modern performance of Meltdown on sweltering NYC summer night.

Fox information on other Meltdown performances, ranging from stand-up comedy to multi-media events, contact Meltdown Performing Arts, Inc., (718) 768-1399.