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On Stage: Rucker & Russo Bring Lively Show to TNC

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Our rule of thumb with reviews is to not tell our readers what wonderful things they have missed but to let them know what they can go out and see. When it comes to young performance artists, however, that is almost impossible to do as they struggle to get even one night bookings. That does not mean that they can not be seen; rather, they are here one night, then somewhere else tomorrow — catching bookings when and where they can play before an audience.

We recently took in a Saturday night performance show at Theater for a New City which is a sample of what you might find if you step out one night. It was a fun evening with an enthusiastic audience which responded with gusto to the stage antics of Bronwyn Rucker and Rick Russo, the performance team that had taken over TNC's cabaret space for a three-day run.

The set for Rucker and Russo's performance work "The True Story," at first looks like a scattering of odds and ends: a small cafe table, a milk cart, tote bag, a wide table covered with small unidentifiable objects and a woman in the shadows painting a cloth on the floor.

A transition period? An unintended arrangement of daily life things left on a stage

between strike and the new set or just a apartment in disarray? No, this was the set for the performance artist team which did its act in a three-night stand recently at Theater for a New City.

"The True Story" traces the evolution of the work and the life of the performance team of Rucker and Russo — she the powerful singer/performer, he the composer/straightman. In this "abstracted reali-

ty" we get snippets of their meeting, their first date, and their early efforts at working together.

The material in this show is a little cryptic, a little funny, sometimes whimsical, and other times nonsensical. Mixed in with some very witty juxtapositions of words and actions are a few juvenile attempts at shocking images like "Fried gumbo with latex sauce". The pace varies from frenzied to

comatose with 100 mile-an-hour monologues to long pauses of dead silence.

Ms. Rucker, a virtual dynamo of energy on the stage has developed a powerful and versatile "instrument," as my singing teacher would say. Her voice mesmerizes — it resonates — it vibrates — it fills the room with its sincerity, strength and pureness of tone.

The songs that she sings, written by herself and Russo, maintain an interesting quality, more like conversation, the melody line might not even encompass half an octave. In a partial recreation of a lecture demonstration for students, Ms. Rucker explains what they do: "He likes to make wierd ugly sounds while I ramble on." This self-deprecation is tongue-in-cheek and only half true.

Mr. Russo's music might be the self-described weird, but it is never ugly. He plays various traditional as well as invented instruments with a sensitivity for the evolution of sound. One example of Mr. Russo's invented instruments he played was his "Cup-a-Phone." This instrument was created by taking a plastic cup, turning it upside down and inserting a wooden toothpick.

"When you move the toothpick, it makes a noise," Russo blithely explains.

Rucker and Russo make as unlikely and inevitable match of opposites as the classic comedy team of Burns and Allen. His deadpan character balances Rucker's boundless supply of energy and sound. While their work is often uneven, they bring a lot of enthusiasm and energy to the stage and their work has some genuinely funny moments that make them well worth catching the next time around.

'The True Story' in a Cabaret Act at TNC



Meltdown Records recording artists Rucker & Russo.