



*In the heart of the
forest,
a space for art.*

Theater review

Sue Ellen Liss: Finding the Lost Spark, A One Woman Show

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It has taken me three months to put together my thoughts on Finding the Lost Spark: A One Woman Show written and performed by Sue Ellen Liss, directed and choreographed by Susan Banyas, choreography consultant, Lanie Bergin. This for me was not a gush of admiration, but a healthy collecting of diverse physical sensations, pains, comparisons. This performance poked at my numbness in the area of mothers and daughters and our mutual yet very differently perceived dilemma. The piece was about allowing oneself to freely express what it is to be a mother, not a queen (like the mother's in stardom, Angelina Jolie and the like) but a mother, with financial and emotional limitations. The predicament some women find themselves in after having children and realizing the inadequacy of dreamy, family fulfillment, realizing they are --bigger.

This is a hard message for everyone, that mothers are human and have a hard time, sometimes for many years, that kids aren't enough to make a life whole. And the guilt of this family unfulfillment (since the mother thinks the dearth is her fault) keeps her silent, certainly not up on a stage making light (and heavy) of it.

A multitude of braveries and victories happened on the little, pocked, and tattered stage at Solar Culture in Tucson on March 31, 2013. Sue Ellen illustrated motherhood with balloons on her breasts, pink and purple scarves, grins and frowns, but also spoke of wanting to be human, to cry out, to speak with passion, to rest and then to perform her story with finesse, to shake some life, some future into the starched, fitted waistlines of her fifty's upbringing, the ditch attempts of the white folks to justify the effects of being severed from the earth and their bodies for many hundreds of years.

Sue Ellen, a school teacher, saved herself beginning with simply-- living in a tree--for a year-- with a child. She was not a hippy. She was raised by, essentially my grandmother, amid dusting and mothballs and stagnant conventionality.

She lived in a tree! The tree rooted her, healed her, she slept a lot. Now it roots her onstage, breathing deep, even when not everyone laughing when they are supposed to (just like us daughters), saying things that her daughter might not want to hear. Saying things, for sure, her parents would not understand. And there

she stood on that stage telling her story, blazing.

Somehow such a common story, it seemed like there was no story at all, just her reminding me of how it was and how my mother's life was, life that no one really valued much, a woman's life. On the stage, it took shape and breadth, elevating the numbed emotions of the neglect of women's experiences and the stable, responsible, church going, laundered middle class to its rightful height. I had renewed respect for the striving of this perfectionistic culture --to hold things together, to look good.

Ahhhh, now, after the play, after the truth, we can fall apart and we can laugh at the old efforts with relief.

Back to the trees, mothers, please, go back to the trees.

