

[AXS ENTERTAINMENT](#) / [ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT](#) / [PERFORMING ARTS](#)

# Smack bang wallop "Whack!!"

February 27, 2016

7:19 AM MST

*Luca Truffarelli*

## Whack!! by Philip Connaughton and Ashley Chen

Rating: ★★★★★

In 'Whack!!' a comedic collaboration choreographed and performed by Philip Connaughton and Ashley Chen, collision, obstruction and physical impact form the backbone for this cute, quaint and quirky offering. Like all good physical comedy, it's all about the set up, and the subsequent pay off found in the ingenuity, daring and dexterity of the physical routines. And this is where 'Whack!!' both succeeds and suffers. Inventive, playful and deeply engaging in places, in the end 'Whack!!' is not quite inventive enough. And while showing some wonder physical interplay at times, it gradually becomes a case of more of the same and suffers from being a little too narrow in its range and focus.

A brief prologue entitled BXL, essentially a one sided dodgeball game that garners a few well deserved giggles, sets the tone for what is to follow. Though enjoyable, whether BXL is sufficient pay off for the two-minute interval that follows is certainly arguable, with the audience patiently waiting for Connaughton and Chen to return dressed in almost matching suits to properly begin.

Executing a repeated sequence in which casually strolling around three sides of a large white mat is followed by a cleverly articulated physical interplay in front of the audience, the simple set up and pay-off is surprisingly effective. This is due in no small measure to Connaughton and Chen's delightful dead pan attempts at dignity, some clever physical routines and their excellent comic timing. Yet while some interactions are wonderfully realised their similarity, along with the constant repetition of the set up, results in originality being swapped for predictability and 'Whack!!' suffers as a result.

With the introduction of a laptop and some simple Bossa Nova beats, things get more interesting for a time. Movement sequences from earlier reappear, but are now injected with much more energy as the collisions and impacts are intensified. If there's a vague hint of violence, it's all extremely playful. Like two kids rough housing, Connaughton and Chen wrestle, push and pull each other to the ground, but it's all smack bang wallop, more spite than street fight. The worse intentional damage would appear to be to wounded pride or lost buttons. This playful battle between bruised male egos is charming and cleverly executed, being wonderfully engaging at first as boys will be boys even if they do dress up as men. But it soon becomes a little predictable, and its narrow focus and repetitions eventually make you wish that a few more ingredients had been added to the pot.

With its repeated set ups for its rough and tumble antics, 'Whack!!' often feels like a comic short turned into a feature length movie. Laugh out loud funny in parts, it just lacked sufficient variety to keep it engaging for its duration, or to fully develop the dark corners it hints at. Yet when it works, like a classic Laurel and Hardy slapstick routine, 'Whack!!' is charming and incredibly funny, and in Connaughton and Chen, features two memorable characters with amazing chemistry at the heart of its performance.

'Whack!!' by Philip Connaughton and Ashley Chen runs at the [Project Arts Centre](#) till February 27th before continuing on tour.

For more information visit [Project Arts Centre](#)



**Chris O'Rourke**  
Theatre Examiner

© 2006-2015 AXS Digital Group LLC d/b/a Examiner.com