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# Odeum's Swimming in the Shallows shows unusual lack of depth

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## Swimming in the Shallows

Rating: ★★☆☆☆

Odeum Theatre Company bring their 2010/2011 season to a close with a surprisingly lacklustre production of Adam Bock's, *Swimming in the Shallows*, currently running at the [Tulsa Performing Arts Center](#), which, despite some serious acting talent, is neither dramatically or theatrically as interesting as it should have been.

*Swimming in the Shallows* takes a quirky look at the intertwining relationships of several friends living in the imaginary town of Twig, Rhode Island. Proceedings begin with Barb and Carla Carla, who sit discussing Barb's conversion to a Buddhist, possession free philosophy and Carla Carla's doubts about her impending commitment ceremony to her highly strung, lesbian lover Donna. Meanwhile Donna, a woman desperately trying to give up smoking even though she doesn't want to, is trying to help her homosexual friend and smoking enabler Nick, who is searching for something deeper than casual one night stands. As the action moves along Barb struggles with her husband Bob and his inability to understand her new, possession free lifestyle, Carla Carla and Donna struggle to make their relationship work and love potentially arrives for Nick in the shape of a shark he meets at the Aquarium where Donna works.

All this could have been incredibly interesting and entertaining but for some curious directorial decisions by Cassie Hollis. Hollis shows herself as a director of some promise, as seen during the pot smoking scene, but the end result is a sense of what could have been. Despite the assertion of producing a non-realistic, stylised piece, theatrically the opportunity for inventiveness was missed, as demonstrated by the awkward use of a screen and especially during the dream sequences. Dramatically, too, there were difficulties. Bock's play walks a fine line between farce and honesty, with moments of real humor interspersed with moments of touching, human frailty. But the decision to play these characters and their insecurities for laughs meant that neither humour nor honesty were ever consistently achieved. Instead of rounded or stylised characters we get cartoon cut outs played mostly over the top and the effect is unsettling.

Will Carpenter as Bob highlights this problem. His loud John Wayne drawl and Frankenstein like

movements made it impossible to see Bob as anything more than a caricature. So when Bob breaks down in the plays most emotionally honest moment, revealing Carpenter as a truly talented actor, the disparity between the two Bobs leaves the onlooker feeling uncomfortable for all the wrong reasons. Similar problems haunt Brittany Bower as Donna and David Laurence as Nick, who though both gifted actors, oscillate uncomfortably between moments of genuine engagement and over the top caricature. Susan Dergoul as Barb is wonderfully engaging and does manage to find the balance, as does lone Michelle Blocker, with both giving the most rounded and credible performances on the night. Likewise John Cruncleton III as the Shark, who brings a powerful sexual presence to the role, and his wonderfully understated performance, along with those of Dergoul and Blocker, are the productions strongest assets.

It would be fair to say that Odeum's 2010/2011 season has been something of a mixed bag. Their opening production of *Bug* was by all accounts outstanding, but their follow up, *After Miss Julie*, was disappointing. Next we had their wonderfully realised *Reasons to Be Pretty* but again, with *Swimming in the Shallows*, Odeum have failed to hit the mark. This lack of consistency is curious and begs the question, why?

Tulsa needs the "controversial" and open to "social discourse" works that Odeum aspire to produce, but in *Swimming in the Shallows* that simply isn't there. As in the beach scene with the Shark and Nick, there's a sense of Odeum being brave, but not being brave enough. The programme notes state that "the company operates as a co-op" which raises the question: do they perhaps need a stronger, more singular vision against which they can bravely test their undoubted gifts and take them to new heights? They undoubtedly have the talent. Will Carpenter with *Reasons to Be Pretty*, showed himself as an extremely accomplished director and David Lawrence is unquestionably one of Tulsa finest actors.

It can only be hoped that for their 2011/2012 season Odeum decides to go for it. For if Odeum where to achieve their true potential Tulsa theatre would be all the richer.

*Swimming in the Shallows* runs at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center, May 6th– 8th



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