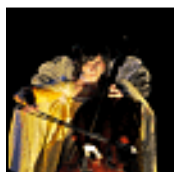


Bonfire Madigan Shive takes 'wild, wild ride'

Aidin Vaziri, Chronicle Pop Music Critic

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Composer, cellist and vocalist Bonfire Madigan Shive provides the exhilarating live one-woman score for the American Conservatory Theater's new production of John Ford's 17th century tragedy " 'Tis Pity She's a Whore." A cult indie-rock star, Shive spends the show in an industrial-baroque organ loft that hovers above the action.

Q: You're onstage for the whole two hours, 40 minutes. What do you do during intermission?

A: The organ loft is pretty much center stage. I'm 13 feet in the air. So I actually find myself having to barrel down the stairs and jump around. I jump up and down and run through the corridors. I often just want to get some exercise and get a big drink of water.

Q: What's the best part about being above the action?

A: I get to watch the whole show every night, and I'm always finding there are different lines that are intriguing. I get to watch the audience. The show is about extremes, and I see a lot of open mouths and wide eyes and confusion. By the end of the show, half the cast is dead, so I see a lot of hands going up to eyes and people gasping. It reminds me of going into a haunted house when I was a child.

Q: It does sound like good family fun.

A: One reviewer said this show has as many subplot twists as an episode of "Lost." I kind of appreciated that. It really is a wild, wild ride. Very few theaters are doing this kind of material. There's one amazing moment toward the end where Giovanni has killed his impregnated sister and then he's going to kill the baby and he's reaching for this knife. I'm watching the audience's eyes get bigger and

bigger and I'm reaching for my bow, and as he's going to stab the baby the whole theater gasps together. It's an amazing moment, but I have to quickly get out of that and make the music happen.

Q: What made you want to drop everything to do this?

A: It's brought me closer to what I envisioned myself doing. I'm in this beautiful set in this gorgeous theater and really getting to explore my instrument, my sounds and story. What I really connected to was this 17th century world, the emotional extremes and the extremes of human passion and desire, and the relationship with the church and state and family. These are themes that have resonated in my own work. I was really encouraged to be a part of the architecture and landscape of the story.

'Tis Pity She's a Whore: By John Ford. Directed by Carey Perloff. Music composed and performed by Bonfire Madigan Shive. *(Through July 6. American Conservatory Theater, 415 Geary St., San Francisco. Two hours, 40 minutes. Tickets: \$17-\$82. Call (415) 749-2228 or go to www.act-sf.org).*

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