

Jan 21 2 min read

<3 Love Song - Tone List (Summer Nights)

Reviewed by Caroline Stafford

The idea of a love song is one that feels ever-present in our modern media and is one that many would say they've heard too many times before, they couldn't imagine anything different. Well after experiencing <3 Love Song at the Blue Room, you might have to redefine what is a love song. You might even have to take a closer look at your definition of love.

<3 Love Song is a performance that weaves together the spoken word of the Writer-composer-director-performer Sage J Harlow (Sage Pbbbt) and musical accompaniment from Annika Moses (Nika Mo, Great Statue), Lyndon Blue (Heathcote Blue, Leafy Suburbs) and Josten Myburgh (Land's Air, Ghost Gum Reverb). At first, the discordant melodies from the three artists are jarring and feel like an overwhelmingly irrelevant cacophony, and seem to take away from the simplicity of Harlow's poetry. However, as the interplay between the two continues, the avant-garde symphony seems to take on a life of its own, reflecting the moods and energy from the prose.

Harlow's work is stark in its simplicity but has a naive tenderness that speaks to the earnestness of the piece and subject. The way she does not dress up her emotions in complex language allows us as viewers to connect with her joys and pains, as her relationship with 'Jay' and 'Kay' is laid bare before us. Harlow also relies heavily on comparison and plurality to explore the boundaries of her relationship and the queerness at its core.

The three musicians seem not to work in harmony for the majority of the piece, which can be jarring as mentioned previously, but does act to build a complex soundscape that echoes Harlow's emotions. Blue pulls us through the story with long, languid violin strokes and Myburgh fills in the spaces with energetic staccato sounds from his saxophone. However, it's Moses' performance that really unites the work. Their vocals and instruments, along with their subtle movements and changes as they perform, immerse and tie Harlow's feelings into the ambient soundscape of the other two performers.

Much like the entirety of the work, the staging and lighting relied on creating an atmosphere for the space as a whole, rather than illuminating the performers themselves. This gave the performance a feeling of intimacy that evoked the idea of heartfelt confessional conversations at a backyard party, faces only glimpsed in the half-light. At times this was disturbed by irrelevant flashes that seemed out of place and did interfere with the overall mood of the work.

In summary, while this performance definitely does not match its description in the program - don't be afraid. You will be led skillfully through a work that challenges the notions of love, songs and monogamy. It's not a show for the faint-hearted, but you might emerge on the other side a little better for having experienced it.



Promotional Image provided by theatre company. Image Credit: Josh Wells.

Reviewer Note: Tickets for this review were provided by the theatre company.