

Life Section, August 2006

Unheard Of! A Musical Revue – Woodstock Fringe

Reviewer: Kitty Montgomery

Ever a student of the *voix humaine* without boundary, we are in awe of Uganda's Samite and South Africa's Vusi Mahasela, warrior artists who infinite vocal timbres and limitless range simply paint to illuminate the subject at hand. Sunrise with birds, compassion surpassing grief, what ever. It is our prejudice that access to such natural gifts are not encouraged in formal training, where singers are taught to have registers, defined as one or another species – tenor, bass, soprano, contralto – and crippled with aesthetic self-consciousness.

So image the amazement of encountering a conservatory trained Caucasian, Watson Heintz, whose *Leider-spiel*, *Unheard Of!* carried free and multi-faceted as the luminous tale-telling by these great Afro-singers. Heintz, who could sing Wagner if she would care to reprise the repertoire of dead white males, was lead act for the fourth Woodstock Fringe Festival, opening at the Byrdcliffe Theater, August 4. Jared Dembowski was her musical director and accomplice, at the piano, with Matt Hussong, stage director.

Great guys, but you are just facilitators to the fabulous Heintz. She may have served

up fewer than 27 varieties of contemporary American song – there were, in fact, sixteen – but levitated each one, incarnate, in a voice uniquely her own. It's definitely soprano, but myriad-faceted, in timbre and emotion, which is the reason half dozen of America's finest young composers of cabaret and musical theater tunes have entrusted their newest best stuff to this show. They include pianist composer Dembowski, collaborating with Pearse and Peters, Bradlow and Lapious, in sundry tunes, Charles Bloom, Beorgia Stitt, Nicolas Levin and those cited below.

Breathing the intimate yearnings of soul, gossamer transparent, in Michael Conley's "I Want," switching to bawdy bodacious as the cowgirl who gets her Tuton, in Rick Vale's "Rootin', Tootin'" – every single character in every song manifests the "real" Watson. Who we love best, among a multitude of vulnerable, exasperated souls, is the wicked woman, inner child, who emerges in eruptive stages via the Hokey-Pokey.

Once we called this artist a "gonzo" soprano, but truly, Heintz a phenomenon of brilliance that knows no bounds.