

## **CONTACT**

Written JOHN WEIDMAN  
Choreography by SUSAN STROMAN

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large. This has been quite a remarkable year for the Virginia Stage Company. The season began with a flat production of a non-play about soda pop wars. But, each production that followed proved the company could do better. With CONTACT, the group soars to its zenith. A miracle has occurred. Flat soda pop has been turned into sparkling fine champagne.

When it opened at Lincoln Center six years ago, CONTACT was so new and original that nobody knew how to classify it. It's a kind of musical but it has no songs or score. The music is, in fact, recorded classics, a melange ranging from Tchaikovsky to Rodgers and Hart with a little Benny Goodman, the Squirrel Nut Zippers and others. Everybody has to dance and act. There is even a little dialogue. Maybe it's a dance-play-musical?

Recorded music is necessary because the characters are dreaming or fantasizing about specific events in their lives that are bound to the music. The dancing is not especially difficult I don't think, but the dancers must create characters. It's not the kind of character creation one sees in the old classical ballets where the dancers gesticulate grotesquely and out the words. It's more like what good actors do in dealing with the famous pauses in Harold Pinter's plays. Well, call it cabbage if you will, to me CONTACT is a unique theatre effort. Weidman and Stroman use what ever ingredients they need, at any given moment, to serve up a dramatic dish that's fit to put before the king.

The three acts all share the theme of people looking for love - or just sex - or love and sex. In short, to find that special person and make contact. The vignettes also have in common Stroman's trademark humor that comes from her unique sense of movement and highly innovative and clever use of props.

Part One is entitled "Swinging". It's source is the 18th century artist Fragonard's bucolic painting called The Swing. A servant and his master are dilly dallying over wine, jewels and a swing at a picnic in the glade of a forest. The fair maiden, giddy Ariel Shepley, is attracted to the gymnastic, handsome servant, portrayed delightfully by Sean Ewing. It's easy to understand why when you see what that boy can do with a rope and a swing.

Part Two is entitled Did You Move? It takes place in an Italian restaurant in Queens where a couple is having a night out. The trouble is, the husband is an abusive, cruel boor who dominates his wife's every move. The mad cap Marx Brothers action surrounding the couple is sheer comedic joy.. Juxtaposed against all this zaniness, we see the lonely unloved wife fantasizing about making contact with the various men in the restaurant. Tina Moya is outstanding in this piece.

She masters the acting challenges of going from high slapstick humor to heart breaking pathos with artistry.

I feel the same way about Fletcher McTaggart as Michael Wiley in the third part of CONTACT. He's 43 years old and really knows no one, including himself. He's had commercial success but is suicidal. In a dream he finds life in an after hours dance club where he meets a mysterious girl in a yellow dress, played by Sheri Griffith. Mc Taggart makes Wiley's suffering very real. Although she's very nice to look at, I found Griffith lacking in depth, a bit vacuous. This piece may go on too long but still fascinates one even so. Director Tome Cousin has captured the dramatic potency of playing humor against pain in this part as well.

All the pieces in this rare jigsaw puzzle of theatre come together with dazzling perfection. This kind of magic only happens when you have very special artists in every department working in tandem

For WHRO-FM, this is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening which I hope will be as stunningly creative as this one.