

## The Magic Of Cinderella

Review By Yale Alexander

When I was a kid, one of the things that parents did for their kids' birthday parties, was take the whole group to a children's theater. I'm pretty sure that was my first experience attending the theater, excluding, of course, the drama occurring daily in my own home. What I do remember, is the magical transportation I felt, sitting in the audience, watching a story unfold on the stage. It changed me. It made me aware that magic does exist in our mundane world. It also made me think of the theater as a church, and to respect and envy those players who had the ability to perform that magic.

Wednesday night, at The Broward Center, I experienced that magic again, at the performance of "Cinderella". From the opening moments, when Ms. Eartha Kitt appears in a skrim cutout, as the Fairy Godmother, I was once again transported. She sets the stage for the magical story to unfold. However, Gabriel Barre, the director, is the one holding the wand. He has flawlessly collected a perfect cast and

crew, to bring the story to life. Pamela Scofield has designed the bright and beautiful costumes, and James Youmans, the set designer, has created a magical place for us to visit. It is Mr. Barre, though, whose clever ideas have taken this production further than any touring show I've seen in a long time. With the brilliant use of puppets, as well as the visible puppeteers, he makes the animals that befriend Cinderella, valuable assets on more than one level.

The cast is wildly diverse, yet a perfect ensemble. Everyone shines in their own right. There are the comic turns of the Stepsisters, Alexandra Colb and Natasha Yvette Williams, along with the hysterical performance of Everett Quinton, as the Wicked Stepmother. Mr. Quinton, of Ridiculous Theater of New York City fame, takes advantage of every comic moment on the stage. His facial expressions alone are worth the price of admission. There is also the perfect baritone of Victor Trent Cook, as the Royal Steward, who knows what's really



Natasha Yvette Williams, Everett Quinton, and Alexander Kolb

going on all along. As for the ensemble, normally a director would use them to just fill space physically and vocally on the stage, but Mr. Barre has cleverly used these performers to move the story, and add laughs along the way.

The principals, however, are what take this show into the stratosphere. Paolo Montalban, as Prince Christopher, is magnificent. He played this role in the recent television production of "Cinderella", starring Brandy and Whitney Houston, and

promptly stole the show. Devastatingly handsome, with a luscious, beautiful voice, he is perfectly suited to the role of the Prince, but he isn't allowed to steal this show. It isn't an overstatement to say that Jamie-Lynn Singer, as Cinderella, sends Brandy packing back to the 'hood. She currently enjoys stardom as Meadow Soprano, on the huge hit "The Sopranos", and it is certainly deserved. As wonderful as she might be on that show, though, she doesn't get to sing on it, and with a voice like hers, they're really missing out. It's obvious that she's an amazing 'soprano' in both shows, though. Here, we get to hear the proof. Her voice is simply perfect. Clear and strong as a bell, her vibrato-less voice is part of the magic spell this show weaves. Together, Paolo and Jamie-Lynn, play a beautiful and believable couple in love.

That brings us back to Eartha. "Cinderella" is a sweet and wonderful story. We all know how it ends, and sometimes, in the process, the telling of it can get a bit 'sticky sweet'. Ms. Kitt insures that isn't going to happen. In this inspired casting, Ms. Kitt brings a little tang to this Magic Kingdom. Dressed in a slinky gown, this is not your usual Fairy Godmother. She asks Cinderella if she's surprised, and did she "expect a tutu and a wand?". She quickly adds, "Been there, done that.". Ms. Kitt is not only in strong voice, but strong body as well. She gets to show off some exotic, sexy moves, that somehow fit her Fairy Godmother image perfectly. When the curtain call came, the applause continually grew louder and louder. The cheers began when the principals came out, and culminated with a roar when Ms. Kitt appeared. All of it was deserved..

The story of "Cinderella" is older than memory. In this jaded world, is it possible to gather a group of players, take them around the country and create a magic that fills hearts with joy? Believe me, it's possible.

## Are You A Good Witch, Or A Bad Witch?

A Chat with Eartha Kitt by Yale Alexander



Eartha Kitt

*Question: You hear a production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Cinderella" is coming to town. You hear that the star is Eartha Kitt. Now, which role do you first imagine her playing? Well, if your first guess was the Wicked Stepmother, you are so WRONG!*

That's right. Ms. Kitt returns to Ft. Lauderdale in the role of the Fairy Godmother. So you might be upset at guessing wrong, but I know I'd love to have her as my Fairy Godmother. I asked her why she is playing against her wicked image this time, and she said, "Well, first, I love the idea of introducing children to the theater, and this

is the perfect show for that. That said, I can tell you my Fairy Godmother is not so sweet and light. There'll be not tutu or wand. What do you expect? I am still Eartha Kitt. You don't have to be namby-pamby for families."

Now, since we all know there has to at least be a big dress involved, I asked Ms. Kitt how she was dealing with the costume, since we all know she's used to skimpier outfits. "The costume is no problem.",

she says, "It's the special effects I have to be careful with. In this production, I appear from behind a tree in a cloud of smoke. They don't use actual smoke anymore, because it was toxic, so they use steam instead. Well, that steam makes it freezing onstage! And it makes the stage slippery!"

"Troupier" would certainly be an apt descriptive of Ms. Kitt. Her career has spanned more than four decades, and as many continents. Starting out as a dancer, she moved to Broadway, nightclubs, records, films, and of course, television. Because of her infamous growl as Catwoman, (yes, I

made her do it for me) her image as the feline temptress has stuck. That's pretty amazing for a grandmother. You know you still hear "Where Is My Man?" in the clubs. So it turns out, after all these years Ms. Kitt is actually working more now, than ever before. "It's gratifying.", she says. "It's nice to feel that I'm still wanted. I feel rejuvenated.". She keeps up with the pace by "always moving and stretching".

As for her perennial "image", she stays grounded by "not taking 'Eartha Kitt' everywhere with me." She says, "I'm happy when people recognize me on the street. But if they're too insistent, I just tell them 'I'm sorry, but I'm not Eartha at this moment'. People respect that. I don't take my character off-stage. But I'm grateful, the public is my Fairy Godmother."

Plans for the near future include a movie of her life story, possible starring Toni Braxton. However, on the rare occasion that Ms. Kitt isn't working, she escapes to her home in upstate New York. Then she gets to enjoy another role: Grandma. Her daughter Kitt conveniently manages her career, giving her plenty of chance to enjoy that role. Eartha Kitt has proven that with the right attitude, anything is "Possible".

## Breathing Room

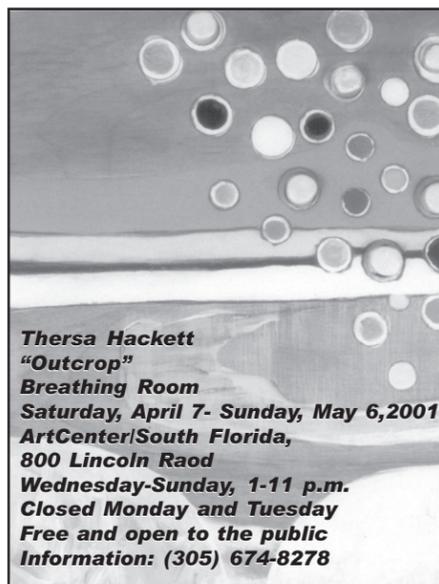
Six artists comment on the simple, central act of respiration in ArtCenter/South Florida exhibition

We do it so often and so effortlessly that we hardly think about it. But when we do think about it, breathing is an amazing thing. On inhalation, the muscles of the nose, throat, chest, ribs and abdomen tense slightly to accommodate the draft of new air. Oxygen and carbon dioxide molecules exchange easily across the interface between the heart and lungs. Upon exhalation, everything relaxes until the diaphragm once again expands for the next natural breath – and so on and so on in an endless, rhythmic, comforting cycle of being alive.

Miami artist Michelle Weinberg was so fascinated by this complex and essential process that she created the concept for the exhibition *Breathing Room*, that opened Saturday, April 7, and runs through Sunday, May 6, at ArtCenter/South Florida's 800 Lincoln Road Gallery. The exhibition, which features the works of artists Tom Burckhardt, Teresa Hackett and Jennie Schueler of New

York City, Nate Cassie of San Antonio, Tex., Karen Snouffer of Gambier, Oh., and Weinberg, offers painted visual impressions of the respiratory experience. The title, *Breathing Room*, connects the artists' desire to "open up" their work with the actual gallery space, a room dedicated entirely to the aesthetic interpretation of breathing.

"I wanted to bring together the works of some of the contemporary artists that I admire," Weinberg explained. "Some of us have shown our works together before, and I felt there was something uniting the way we worked." Collectively, this group of artists has exhibited at private galleries in New York, nationwide and in Europe, and at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Neuberger Museum, the Corcoran Museum of Art, the Weatherspoon Museum and the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art. They are the recipients of awards from the



Thersa Hackett "Outcrop" *Breathing Room* Saturday, April 7- Sunday, May 6, 2001 ArtCenter/South Florida, 800 Lincoln Road Wednesday-Sunday, 1-11 p.m. Closed Monday and Tuesday Free and open to the public Information: (305) 674-8278

the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, the Elizabeth Foundation, the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, New York Foundation for the Arts, the Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation, the Ohio Arts Council, ArtPace Foundation, Edward Albee Foundation, the MacDowell Colony and Yaddo.

Weinberg asked each artist to create two

pieces: one about inhalation and constriction, and one about exhalation and release. The exhibition will include interactive instructions for viewers to breathe in at the first piece by each artist, then breathe out at the second piece. Snouffer will create a wall drawing (using paint, to be painted over at the close of the exhibition), while the other artists will create pieces that will be wall mounted, flat or relief works.

"The concept of breathing space in a flat piece of art reflects the desire for buoyancy in the human spirit," Weinberg said. "Artists in their studios talk about space, but that space needs to be opened up in their work. *Breathing Room* will demonstrate how the perfect condition of being filled with air, then expelling that air, finds consonance in visual art."

A full color catalog will be available.

For more information about *Breathing Room*, call ArtCenter at 305.674.8278 between the hours of 10am and 6pm.

The exhibition will be held through May 6, 2001, at ArtCenter/South Florida, 800 Lincoln Road, Miami Beach. The exhibition is open Wednesday through Sunday, 1-11pm. Closed Monday - Tuesday, and is free and open to the public.