



Tilt

April 3, 2019 – Joel Benjamin



Rachel Cohen's *Tilt*, a world premiere presentation of Racoco Productions at the Abrons Arts Center of the Henry Street Settlement on the Lower East Side, was 80 minutes of creative genius, slow moving at times, but always fascinating.

The Experimental Theater Space at the Abrons, a not particularly large black

box, was turned into a complex construction site by the *Tilt* creative staff, a truly unique interactive set. Above the audience hung a crooked runway along which a ball was occasionally mysteriously rolled. The ball eventually hit some metal gongs and went on to roll down a Rube Goldberg like contraption and onto the stage floor.

A multi-layered structure occupied stage left. (Set design by Bill Kennedy whose *mastery* of space was phenomenal.) In the front of this room-like sculpture was a little porch on which a tap dancer, Heather Cornell stood, only her lower body in view, almost continually performing tap steps on a tiny square of floor during the entire length of the show.



Meghan Schardt, Toby Billowitz, Rachel Cohen, Masumi Kishimoto and Remi Harris in a scene from Racoco Productions' "Tilt" at the Abrons Arts Center (Photo credit: Julie Chetaille)

From the top of this box slowly emerged a woman, the quietly intense Rachel Cohen dressed in a two-piece grey crocheted outfit (inventive costumes designed by Olek).

After tossing pieces of wood onto the stage, she lowered a ladder, descended and began an adventure too complicated to describe except to say that the spirit of Cervantes' *Don Quijote* was evoked, climaxing with a sensational battle with a windmill ingeniously assembled right on the stage by four dancers in black wearing mesh masks.

These four—Toby Billowitz, Remi Harris, Masumi Kishimoto and Meghan Schardt—act as a combination of Greek Chorus and Bunraku Puppeteers, constantly taking all the tiny pieces of Kennedy's intricate set, reassembling them and re-reassembling until their purposes were exhausted. A hanging wooden effigy became in turn Don Q's armor, a dancing puppet (held up by the four dancers) and an ominous image of death pursuing the main character.

A chair, when disassembled morphed cleverly into a flying horse for Ms. Cohen, her wings formed by flexible triangles that later were repurposed as the blades of the windmill with which the epic stylized battle is fought and lost.



Meghan Schardt, Masumi Kishimoto, Rachel Cohen, Toby Billowitz and Remi Harris in a scene from Racoco Productions' "Tilt" at the Abrons Arts Center (Photo credit: Olek)

When Ms. Cohen's Quixote appeared to lose everything and the set seemed to fall to pieces, Ms. Cornell emerged from half-view to begin the work *da capo*, descending from the set's attic via the same ladder, her quietly tapping, scraping, stomping feet moving the detritus of the set about, reanimating the Don Q story, again pursued by the devilish chorus of four leading to a quietly satisfying ending.

Ms. Cohen's choreography was slow and deliberate, emphasizing angular arm movements and gestures, all performed to the moody music created by Lynn Wright who played guitar and Ableton* along with Eric Eble (double bass), Nikki D'Agostino (woodwinds) and Eric Hoegemeyer (Ableton* and percussion). The ambiance created by Ms. Wright's score was eerily otherworldly.

Jon Harper's lighting found every nuance in the set and the performers.

The title *Tilt* referred to a pinball machine as a metaphor for the inner workings of one's head.

*An electronic device that produces sounds.

Tilt (March 29-30 and April 2-6, 2019)

Racoco Productions

Abrons Arts Center at the Henry Street Settlement

The Experimental Theater Space, 466 Grand Street, in Manhattan

For tickets, visit <http://www.abronsartscenter.org>

Running time: 80 minutes without an intermission