

Let's Get Metaphysical With Cirque de Vol's Aerial Allegories in The Fringe Dwellers

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photo courtesy of Cirque de Vol

The Fringe Dwellers

The mystical is no longer the exclusive province of the shaman, the yogi, and the seer—not with quantum physicists detailing their latest mind-boggling experiments in peer-reviewed journals (and in subsequent, inevitable TED Talks).

But that's really not news. In the 1960s, as the mythos goes, an entire generation set off in search of enlightenment through everything from surfing to psilocybin. Nearly half a century later, a Buddhist friend reminds me that almost any activity can be done mindfully. So I'm willing to go along with the intriguing premise director Sara Phoenix explores in Cirque de Vol's *The Fringe Dwellers* in Burning Coal Theatre Company's second-stage series.

Why not add trapeze work, adagio and aerial dance, and contact improv to the long list of methods humans have used to reach out toward the cosmos? Can't these serve as compelling metaphors for our place in the universe as well? This imaginative production answers yes.

In the parables of Toni Craige's aerial flights of fancy—and in her earthbound, blindfolded, close-contact duet with Adam Dipert—we do indeed see humans on the fringe, pushing at the edges of the possible and the self. In her pensive trapeze work, Carlie Huberman probes the borders of balance, both figuratively and literally, with partner Jeff Kochuk.

Animals show up as spiritual templates in engaging aerial movements "The Kiss of Grace" and "The Cat Lady," as well as in Anna Renee Ohe's "Sealskin/Soulskin," a modern dance sequence based on an Inuit legend. Host Brian Cooper's new-age musings grow ponderous in places, as during Paige LaWall's mesmerizing hoop work during "New Depths." Still, the show pokes fun at them during Cooper's comic "Corporate Shaman/Self Love Vows," a marriage ceremony for one.

Ryan Matthews's trombone work tastefully augments Brian Shaw and Tim Lemuel's soundscape and trippy projected visuals. But the real metaphysics found in *The Fringe Dwellers* lie in the bodies of the performers as they simultaneously manifest risk, grace, change, and Newtonian physics. Their airborne and land-based achievements provide the clearest signal about the possibilities awaiting us just outside our conventional physical, intellectual, and spiritual comfort zones.

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