

## Theater Review: Collaboraction Exposes the ‘Gender Breakdown’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 4, 2017 - 10:01am

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CHICAGO – In a spectacular original work, the power of the theater comments upon the inequity of “types” for women performers in the theater and other media. Collaboraction’s “Gender Breakdown” is a performance piece on how women are subject to many cattle calls just based on how they look, and how certain women – especially those of color and ethnicity – will not even be considered for roles that involve romance or portraying a lead protagonist, for example...even when doing scene training in college. The stories are direct and authentic, and burst from the hearts of the storytellers. It runs in Chicago through March 19th, 2017 (see link below).



Play Rating: **4.5/5.0**

The piece is split into vignettes that “break down” the situations that woman actors are subjected to, both on the highest, lowest and academic levels. The unfairness of it all wears upon the psyche of the women involved, and the showcase seeks to empower them once again. There is deep poignancy, tremendous courage and a coming to identity in presenting this show, which was created by Dani Bryant and directed by Erica Vannon.



The Cast of ‘Gender Breakdown’

Photo credit: Anna Sodziak for Collaboraction



Ten women bound onto the stage to begin the presentation like extras in a “B” movie about Hollywood...each with a suitcase and a dream. The song they sing is “No Business Like Show Business,” the cheery musical anthem celebrating everything about the career of performance. Eventually the song is interrupted, as in “everything about it is...sexist at times, racist at times, judgmental at times...” instead of the real lyrics. This introduces the rest of the show, with sketches that are monologues, skits and expressions of symbolism regarding the narrowness of casting considerations in the “business.”

The subjects of the exposés are eye opening, especially in a sketch in which a casting agent sizes up a roomful of hopefuls and dismisses them one-by-one because of their perceived flaws – based often on the tired whim of the agent. Actress Aimy Tien (they use their real names in the show) laments that people always ask her “what are you,” based on her Asian background. And “Where do your parents come from?” becomes the inevitable next question, to which Aimy answers, “Denver.” Judging the covers is a constant for women, especially women of color, ethnicity or a more fluid sexual identity, and it obscures the intuition they might have as actors. The potential is lost in all performance media when this occurs.

There are many highlights, but one standout is a dance sequence with Mia Vivens and Carolyn Sinon, where their movements interact through their stories about lacking dance opportunities, even though their bodies enact the choreography beautifully, they are just not the “right” bodies to be ballerinas (for lack of a better term). Rula Gardinier, an actress with Middle Eastern roots, relates a compelling story about her escape from an arranged marriage, and how she built a life beyond those clutches, and stays on course regarding her work as an actress. Kamille Dawkins performs a plea about love, how roles of romance are elusive to her “type” – it is heart breaking in its truth.



LtoR: Siobhan Marguerite Reddy-Best, Rula Gardinier & Carolyn Sinon of ‘Gender Breakdown’

Photo credit: Anna Sodziak for Collaboraction

The whole cast is strong and excited to tell these stories, with Jazmin Corona, Kate Hawbaker Krohn, Priya Mohanty, Siobhan Marguerite Reddy-Best, and Brianna Buckley also presenting their lives as performers. Their names are not Smith and Jones, but why shouldn’t they be considered for the same opportunities as Smith and Jones, given the mixture of our world? This show provides important information about a strange and judgmental industry, and ends with a plea to Chicago and elsewhere for more diversity and more sanity.

The stories and their presentations are mesmerizing in total, and important as a shot across the bow both of exclusion, and the vanilla blandness of sameness in casting. It is often said we are victims of our own circumstances, but that shouldn’t apply to performance. “Gender Breakdown” makes a substantial case for letting talent and performance energy determine all roles.

*Collaboraction Studios Presents “Gender Breakdown” at The Vault Space, 1579 North Milwaukee (3rd Floor) in Chicago, Thursday-Saturday at 7:30pm and Sundays at 3pm through March 19th, 2017. [Click here](#) [21] for more information, dates/times and to purchase tickets. Featuring Rula Gardenier, Brianna Buckley, Jazmin Corona, Kamille Dawkins, Kate Hawbacker-Krohn, Priya Mohanty, Siobhan Marguerite Reddy-Best, Carolyn Sinon, Aimy Tien and Mia Vivens. Created by Dani Bryant. Directed by Erica Vannon.*



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