

Public Theatre's **DANCING LESSONS** Is a Poignant Pas de Deux

by Carla Maria Verdino-Süllwold
Reviews | Mar. 22, 2022]

The Public Theatre's latest offering is a poignant, quirky romantic comedy that becomes a heartwarming pas de deux between its injured dancer heroine and a geoscientist with Asperger's Syndrome, who enlists her help not only in learning to dance,

but also in exploring, what for him, is the uncharted territory of human friendship and intimacy. Mark St. Germain's 2014 two-character, seventy-five minute play dances with an ironic humor, fast repartee, unexpected revelations that evolve from the relationship of this mismatched pair, and an ending that is hopeful in its transformative inner reality.

Janet Mitchko directs with a keen sense of the pacing and a deft touch that keeps the balance between humor and pathos. Suzannah Herschkowitz, as Senga, and Jed Peterson as Ever, display a sure-fire chemistry and sharp sense of timing. Herschkowitz is both tough and vulnerable and entirely convincing as she eventually confides some of her deepest secrets to Ever. Peterson gives a compelling account of Ever's fears, phobias, and atypical way of thinking and speaking, and he gives a moving account of his character's gradual and courageous embrace of new experience. When he ultimately does dance in the final scene, it is with inspired abandon.

The unit set (Senga's apartment changed by lighting into Ever's classroom) is attractively conceived by Amber Callahan with its dark mauve walls hung with dance photos and realistic set decoration to suggest a New York studio. Heather M. Crocker provides the atmospheric lighting and projections, including the dance sequence in silhouette of Senga before her injury. Anne Collins designs the contemporary casual costumes, while John Morrison handles the sound and Lisa Bragdon serves as Stage Manager.

The Public is also to be congratulated for the very sleek look of its streaming video presentation.

DANCING LESSONS is a play about risk taking and finding the courage to step outside our comfort zones; it is a story about what seeming opposites can teach each other, and it is a tale which offers no pat answers - only the comfort of human contact and sharing



Suzannah Herschkowitz as Senga Quinn and Jed Peterson as Ever Montgomery in Dancing Lessons.