

NY THEATRE REVIEW Profile 2011 by Oliver Butler

Mallory Catlett is a New York based director and dramaturg who works with some of the most respected performance ensembles, writers, artists, and designers in collaborative development situations. For over ten years she has been creating ambitious new projects that have been produced at many theatres including The Ontological-Hysteric Theater, Performance Space 122, The Collapsible Hole, and HERE Arts Center.

I know that Mallory frequently works companies such as Latitude 14 and Juggernaut Theater Company. Most of the work I have seen of Mallory's has been with the New York City company Banana Bag & Bodice (BBB). I feel a kinship to her, because of my work developing plays with my own ensemble, The Debate Society. While I know the aesthetic of BBB is a reflection of the ensemble members' various aesthetics, her projects with them feel incredibly unified and seamless, without sacrificing a punk-rock aesthetic and grittiness. The roughness adds flavor to the world of the play and the authenticity to the experience. The productions are layered and mysterious. She is acutely skilled at creating vivid feelings of entrapment and elongated distress peppered with hints of whimsy. *Beowulf, A Thousand Years of Baggage* captured the grandness of the classic tale, but also undercut the preciousness of the classic: Beowulf himself was played as the grand mythological warrior—his hugeness amplified by the pounding music, but he wore glasses and presented himself with a human, modern awkwardness, which was very funny and dark simultaneously.

In her production of *Space/Space* at The Ohio Theater, two identical twin brothers were trapped in a spaceship rocketing into deep space. Their existence is punctuated with regular feedings of sandwiches, ethereal voices, and a growing sexual tension between them. The performers (writer Jason Craig and company partner Jessica Jeliffe) captured the nuance of claustrophobia in addition to the hugeness of paranoia. Mallory surrounded the characters with a world that amplified these feelings, while leaving room for the comedy between the doppelgängers to play. *Oh What War* focused on a group of military deserters that were holed up in a bunker. The characters were trapped and skittish—but they also presented these uncomfortable cabaret performances that created a feeling of shame and loss with a little ugly razzle and dazzle.

There is something different about her in relation to other American directors; indeed her work has successfully toured to Ireland, Canada, France, and The Netherlands. There is a “slightly other” feel to her projects, a nagging suspicion during her productions that there may be a highly subversive maestro at work, a mad-scientist living among us. Initially, her plays feel exciting and comfortable, but seem to always secretly house a conceptual traitor, a sleeper cell waiting to emerge and flip us on our asses.

Her plays tend to have a gnarly asymmetry. There are many surprises, but they are created without cleverness. She makes worlds that are full and vibrant. Her projects are ambitious, unashamed, and sometimes deliberately strange. She is a unique voice in direction and creation, who has wooed some of the best artists I know to work with her again and again. www.mallorycatlett.net

—**Oliver Butler** is a co-Artistic Director of The Debate Society, where he has developed and directed seven new plays with writer/performers Hannah Bos and Paul Thureen.