

Fertile Ground Diaries: *A Thousand Tongues*

The electric cello, fog and Middle Eastern music are hypnotizing.

By Sophia June | January 26, 2016

Danish performer Nini Julia Bang never sang in English, but I hung on to her every word.

Selena Gomez blared when I started my car after watching Bang perform *A Thousand Tongues*. Any other time, I might've bobbed my head to Z100, but I made the 20-minute drive home from Headwaters Theater in silence.

After hearing Bang sing for 35 minutes, I didn't want to listen to anything else. I needed her voice to stay stuck in my head.

The performance began when the audience was still in the lobby of Headwaters Theater, which is tucked behind a red industrial building bordering the train tracks at Williams/Vancouver's north end.

Bang sat in the front row, an odd choice with much of the audience standing due to a lack of seats. The stage was bare except for a piano accordion and a cloud of fog, which slowly uncurled. Bang played the cello; her big toe rested on the knob of her loop station. Her voice rang out in ah's, eh's and ee's that sounded like Middle Eastern chanting. Musically, Bang's style ranged from hypnotic Middle Eastern chants to Bulgarian folk music to classical Mediterranean music, all accompanied by the cello or piano accordion, and sometimes both. Bang's high register rang out fully and clearly, but her real talent was in her middle range, when the notes sounded beautifully empty and raw.

At the end of her song, Bang finally carried her cello to center stage. Long, deep notes started the next song, then abruptly broke into high-pitched screams, as Bang twisted her face like she was receiving an exorcism.

For her next song, she abandoned her cello and attached it to a cord hung from the ceiling that was invisible in the darkness. She played her cello while it was suspended in midair and used her looper to create an electronic mix live. She stepped away to dance and angrily tore down a white translucent curtain and then danced behind it, so we saw only her shadow. This song was the first where Bang looked at the audience head on. She brought the curtain back behind her head and backed up. We saw her lit face for a few seconds before she let go of the curtain and allowed it to encompass her again.

For Bang's last song, she sang and played piano accordion with her head twisted in the sheet. By the end, she was uncovered. She faced us for the last time before the stage went black.

That's an image that hits you hard enough that even Selena Gomez can't pop it out of your head.

COMMENTS

|

MOST READ