

WILL YOU ALTAR YOUR LIFE? “(UN)BRIDALED”

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“There comes a point in every girl’s life ...” Well, maybe not every girl. And it’s hard to say whether the emerging person is, at any given moment, a girl or a woman.

But culture — and family, its main carrier — pays no attention to such fine points. It wades into your life with a handful of “one size fits all” assumptions, pushing you into the gender and role containers it has on the shelf.

The blossoming of the individual and the pushy efforts of the culture come to a head in a splendid collision known as: marriage.



Photo: Jorge Vismara

That collision — or the moment just before it happens — is where Marina Magalhães locates her powerful new work, *(un)bridaled*. With five gifted dancers, the Brazilian-born choreographer leads a poignant journey into the soul space all young women share when they confront the issue(s) of marrying.

(Un)bridaled’s driving energy comes not only from its eclectic blend of music (from samba and batuque to rock and hip-hop) but also from the voices of virgins — girls on the verge.

Freed from silence, their voices explode into the familiar rites and ceremonies. They cry “No!” when dancers enact a homage to women’s traditional roles, they shout “I don’t give f***!” in a hilarious rap retort to the advice of abuelitas, and they hum a haunting polyphonal distortion of Wagner’s *Wedding March* while two brides strike photo poses that keep melting into twisted masks of anguish and abuse.

To Magalhães’ credit, this is not a screed. She is giving voice, not lecturing. *(Un)bridaled*’s overall movement is fast, fluid and often funny (though its moments of elegy can be excruciating). She lets young women’s fears and angers speak, setting everything from coy uncertainty to terror and rage into the language of movement — which usually holds more possible meanings than the spoken word.

At the work’s center, Magalhães erects a painful image. A young woman stands stunned, interrogated by an immigration officer. She haltingly offers answers (which we’ve just heard as responses to marriage), and is refused, told she will be deported.

Then, as dancers daub her white dress with green paint, a recorded voice speedily babbles instructions for the forms you must fill out to immigrate as a spouse. When the painting is done, the girl takes the brushes and paces forward, holding them as a bouquet, in a cruel parody of a bridal march.

This disturbing image is not explained. It is left to resonate. For me, it suggests the color of growing things — and of money. As in an immigration fee, or a dowry. What she must cover herself in, sacrificing her purity, her identity, to be acceptable. The disfiguring disguise she must wear to enter a country. Or a family. Or adulthood.

Some 2,500 years ago, the Greeks acknowledged the importance of the cusp between “girl” and “bride” (the only adult role open to a woman) by imagining a goddess in that gateway. Artemis stood as protector of sacred wilderness and all that lives in it, including unmarried girls in the full flowering of their youth.

In *(un)bridaled*, Magalhães acts as a modern Artemis, setting her half-dozen artists in motion. Dancing and singing (and speaking, as an iPhone screen scrolls wedding-industry images) they portray — and evoke in us — the complex emotions of life hanging in a balance, poised on a threshold.

Cameron Pieratt’s lighting helps deftly to tell the story, as does Sophia Stoller’s projection. Costumer Katie Jorgenson magically transforms a simple white dress into everything from a girl’s shift to a bridal dress and — at the end — a *candomble* dancer’s floating form. Of special note, too, are dancer Erica Rey’s vocal and mixing skills, adding emotionally rich musical moments to the mix.

Finally, underpinning the creative team’s imaginative artistry is Magalhães subtle mastery of the language of dance. Again and again, she surprises us by injecting undercurrents and counter-rhythms, setting — and then quietly breaking, or enriching — patterns and expectations.

This occurs movingly in the finale, as an energetic duet widens into a full-company bacchanal set to Las Cafeteras’ tempestuous *Ya Me Voy (I’m Leaving Now)*. Within it, the early “traditional” sequences to which watching dancers had shouted “No!” are reprised, amid the widening whirling of the other, liberated dancers. At the same time, in their floating grace, these dancers suddenly stomp like peasant women pounding wine out of grapes.

Magalhães has a rich, complex vision. She and her collaborators bring it to life powerfully in their music and media choices, in the dancers’ movements, in the emotions they evoke in us, and in the reflections they lead us to.

These are artists to be reckoned with, and *(un)bridaled* is an unrivaled dance theatre experience.

You have only one weekend left to catch it at the intimate Le Studio. If Artemis is watching, it should appear again on a larger stage somewhere in LA. But the gods can be capricious — so see it now.

(Un)bridaled, created by Marina Magalhães, with dancer-collaborators Stephanie Castro, Rachel Hernandez, Veline Mojarro, Mariana Reis, and Erica Rey.

Presented at Le Studio, 9500-B Jefferson Blvd., Culver City.

Thursday (Sept. 25) through Saturday (Sept. 27) at 8:30 pm.

Tickets: www.brownpapertickets.com/event/840713>