

The boundaries between tap and music blur.

BY SIOBHAN BURKE



Delving deep at a retreat for body-swapping.

BY ALISSA WILKINSON



Ancient Greek sculpture from its earliest days.

BY ROBERTA SMITH



WeekendArts

The New York Times



CHANTAL ANDERSON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

As a Movie ‘Wife,’ She Slays

Maya Erskine taps her inner spy to play faux newlyweds with Donald Glover in a new ‘Mr. & Mrs. Smith.’

By ALEXIS SOLOSKI

“What would happen if James Bond had a blister?” Maya Erskine wondered recently. Erskine, 36, an actor and writer, has been thinking of hypotheticals like these ever since Donald Glover (“Atlanta,” “Swarm”) approached her about starring in “Mr. & Mrs. Smith,” the reboot of the 2005 action comedy. That film, which starred Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, was a stylized, sexed-up spy

story, in which newlyweds discover that each is an operative assigned to assassinate the other. This eight-episode series, created by Glover and the writer Francesca Sloane, arrives Friday on Amazon Prime Video. It trades some of that sex for a more faithful approach to marriage and espionage. The new John and Jane Smith, played by Glover and Erskine, are spies hired by a shadowy organization to pose as a married couple. (Phoebe Waller-Bridge was initially announced as Glover’s co-star, but she left

in 2021, citing creative differences.) While completing high-risk missions and racking up casualties, John and Jane are also achieving various relationship milestones — first date, first kiss, first vacation. Blisters and other minor injuries abound, as well as conversations about annoying eating habits and gas. Erskine, best known as a creator of the Hulu comedy “PEN15,” in which she starred as a heightened version of her seventh-

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From left, Paul Zimet, Michael Silverstone, Ellen Maddow and Abigail Browde. Zimet and Maddow collaborated with Browde and Silverstone on the new play “The Following Evening.”



JEANNETTE SPICER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Couples Contemplate Mortality and Renewal

‘The Following Evening’ presents mirror images of two married pairs of theater makers.

By LAURA COLLINS-HUGHES

Outside the big, tall windows of Ellen Maddow and Paul Zimet’s Manhattan loft, in a former garment factory on Mercer Street in SoHo, is a slice of the New York skyline: up close, rooftops of old brick buildings, solid as can be; farther off, glass towers — taller, sleeker, colder, newer. In a city forever in flux, Maddow, 75, and Zimet, 81, have stayed put for half a century, creating experimental theater in the skylighted boho oasis that cost \$7,000 to buy in 1973, and where they raised their family. Having arrived in the neighborhood when it was scary scruffy, long before it

went way upscale, they have remained stubbornly devoted to each other, and to their venerably niche downtown company, Talking Band, which turns 50 this year. That kind of history can sound utopian from the outside. But misunderstanding is a risk they’re taking, cautiously, with “The Following Evening,” a new play in which they portray slightly fictionalized versions of themselves, in slightly fictionalized versions of their lives. “Does this all sound romantic?” Zimet asks rhetorically in the show’s prologue, where he reminisces about the past. “I really hope it doesn’t.” And yet, how could it not? Maybe especially to younger New York theater artists like Abigail Browde, 42, and Michael Silverstone, 43, better known as the duo 600 Highwaymen. Creators of the inventive pan-

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Couples Ponder Mortality and Renewal

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demio trilogy “A Thousand Ways,” they have spent their careers navigating a theater landscape that lately has shifted unnervingly.

“The Following Evening,” which they wrote and directed, is a meditation on mortality and renewal, art and evanescence, embrace and entanglement. Running through Feb. 18 at the Perelman Performing Arts Center, where Browde and Silverstone perform opposite Maddow and Zimet, it presents mirror images of two married pairs of theater makers. Scenes of dialogue are interspersed with stylized movement.

“In the beginning,” Silverstone said, “Abby and I were really contemplating the intimacy of Paul and Ellen, really exploring physically a lot. Watching them work together, and making dances for them.”

Maddow recalled: “They interviewed us a lot, too. There was one time where you had to do the whole story of your life while doing some movement that went on for about three hours. It was fun.”

The couples share a rare commonality. Browde described it as “this very weird, dense overlap of what it means to be not only a theater artist in this specific lineage and community, but also to live in such a strange domestic experience,” where there are “no hard edges” between work and life.

It was a Saturday afternoon last month at the loft, and they had just run through “The Following Evening” for a small invited audience that included two dogs — Maddow and Zimet’s glossy Ava, ebullient in the front row, and Browde and Silverstone’s tousled Pablo, lounging on cushions just offstage.

Afterward, as the four humans sat around the kitchen table, that experimental lineage was a bright thread through the conversation: when Zimet mentioned the reading he’d just done with Taylor Mac, Talking Band’s old pal; or Browde noted that she’d taken the choreographer Annie-B Parson’s class three times as an undergraduate at New York University; or Silverstone explained that he and Browde became interested in Zimet when he performed in a workshop of David Byrne’s “Theater of the Mind” that they collaborated on, in 2017 on Governors Island.

Consciousness of that experimental, downtown tradition glimmers in “The Following Evening,” too, as when Zimet refers to “Joe” — Joseph Chaikin, the founder of the influential Open Theater, where Maddow and Zimet met.

The play has been in progress since 2018, when Talking Band commissioned a work for Zimet and Maddow to perform. Back then, Browde said, she and Silverstone were feeling depleted, and a little jaded, after too many months on the road with their shows. So the impression they got, being in the room with Maddow and Zimet, struck them profoundly.

“These are people who have lived through multiple cycles of change in their lives, in their work, in the city,” she said. “They aren’t cynical. You don’t feel that there’s callous scar tissue. These are people who have a tremendous amount of hope, energy, optimism, and have all these shows planned out.”

Indeed they have, with two more premieres coming up downtown: “Existentialism,” directed by Anne Bogart, from Feb.

Clockwise, from above right: The team in rehearsal for “The Following Evening”; Paul Zimet and Ellen Maddow; Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone; Zimet and Maddow again. The couples are a generation apart, but share the same creative goals.

‘They aren’t cynical. You don’t feel that there’s callous scar tissue.’

ABIGAIL BROWDE ON ELLEN MADDOW AND PAUL ZIMET, WHOM SHE AND MICHAEL SILVERSTONE ARE WORKING WITH

23-March 10 at La MaMa, and “Shimmer and Herringbone,” in May at 122CC, a production that will also include Tina Shepard, the third founding member of Talking Band.

It is, then, a bit misleading that the marketing copy for “The Following Evening” tugs at the heartstrings by calling the show “an intimate portrait of two artists creating what may be their final performance together,” beneath a photo of Maddow and Zimet. That truly is an idea that has percolated through the show, but they don’t identify with it.

“Every time you brought that up,” Maddow said to Browde and Silverstone, not unkindly, “we’d say, ‘Could you take that out? Because we don’t want this to be our final show.’ Don’t even say that. It’s like bad luck.”

Talking Band, as it happens, sounds more sanguine about its future than do 600 Highwaymen. Browde and Silverstone are still bruised by what they said was the cancellation, by a major New York City theater, of a production of “The Following Evening” that was to have opened last April. (They are legally prohibited from naming the theater, they said.)

“The fact is, we have nothing lined up,” Silverstone said. “We have no new work. We have nothing beyond this. When we started, we thought that we were making this piece about these two people who were making their final show, and yet it actually ended up being about us: Is this our final show?”

More narrowly, the question might be whether it is their last show made in New York. They are thinking of leaving Prospect

Heights, Brooklyn, next year for a town in France that could be what Silverstone called “a next place of inspiration.”

New York, in Browde’s view, is “not doing great at holding on to theater artists,” in part, she believes, because it no longer supports theatrical development as it once did.

“And, you know, we work in theater,” she said. “So of course I think that things that are fleeting are beautiful, but also there’s something lost when each generation just is like lemmings off the cliff.”

For both couples, a lot of life has happened in the years that “The Following Evening” has been in process. Browde and Silverstone — symbiotic now, but genuine enemies, they say, when they were N.Y.U. undergrads — had a baby who has become a toddler; Maddow and Zimet gained three grandchildren; Zimet had a bicycle accident that worked its way into the show.

And the \$500 million Perelman opened on the site of the World Trade Center — its dripping-with-wealth glamour as different as could be from the Talking Band aesthetic, but a form of regeneration anyway.

Zimet frets less about the health of the city and the theater than he does of the world, which he believes has grown dire. On his list of worries are “the end of democracy, the climate collapsing, what it’s going to be like for our grandchildren.”

But as he and Maddow prepare for their other show “Existentialism,” he said, he takes comfort in a line from Sartre: “There may be more beautiful times, but this one is ours.”

Maddow added: “It’s the only one we’re going to get.”

LAUREL GRAEBER | THEATER REVIEW

This Yellow Brick Road Leads to Her Roots

A reimagined ‘Wizard of Oz’ follows an angsty teenager who disdains her heritage.

EVERY DRAMATIZATION of “The Wizard of Oz” seems to offer a pilgrimage to the Emerald City. But “El Otro Oz,” the inspired and imaginative interpretation now playing at Atlantic Stage 2, introduces additional journeys that are ultimately more poignant and profound.

When I first saw this Latin-flavored retelling of L. Frank Baum’s tale two years ago, I was most impressed by its comic inventiveness. (TheaterWorksUSA presented it then as a revised, more bilingual version of its own 2011 show “The Yellow Brick Road.”) That 2022 production, retitled “El Otro Oz” (Spanish for “The Other Oz”), included a pet Chihuahua named Toquito, a wizard who’s a disco diva and, in place of the withered Wicked Witch of the West, the sultry, flamenco-costumed Bruja del Oeste, whose magical castanets evoke a predatory rattlesnake.

None of these creative flourishes have changed, but whether it’s because of world events or the nuances of Melissa Crespo’s

direction, I found this new production by Atlantic for Kids (the young people’s division of Atlantic Theater Company) as tender and moving as it is ebullient and funny.

With a book by Mando Alvarado and Tommy Newman, and music and lyrics by Newman and Jaime Lozano, the show focuses on Dora (Nya Noemi, passionate and clear-voiced), an angsty adolescent in contemporary Chicago. More an admirer of Beyoncé than of merengue, the American-born Dora deeply resents her Mexican immigrant mother’s plans for a quinceañera, the traditional celebration of a girl’s 15th birthday. After she reluctantly dons a voluminous pastel dress for the occasion, Dora wails, “I look like cotton candy!” (Stephanie Echevarria designed the vivid costumes.)

Before long, a mysterious healer appears, telling Dora she is only “half of the whole.” (Christian Adriana Johannsen juggles this role expertly with that of the seductive bruja.) Then the teenager is swept into El Otro Oz, where, according to one of its residents, her family’s picnic table has crushed the witch’s sister “flat as a Dorito.”

Once Dora acquires the enchanted ruby slippers, she must, of course, reach the wizard. But she’s also beginning to understand that she has embraced only part of who she



El Otro Oz
Through Feb. 18 at Atlantic Stage 2 in Manhattan; atlantictheater.org. Running time: 1 hour 5 minutes.

is. As she explores El Otro Oz with new friends — the Scarecrow (Adriel Jovian); the Iron Chef (Eli Gonzalez), who travels with a food cart instead of an oil can; and the meek Mountain Lion (Danny Lemache) — she comes to appreciate the heritage that she has often cruelly rejected. The score, which blends mariachi-style melodies with emotive show tunes, offers ample opportunities for Dora to practice traditional dance, and young audiences may find that Alessandra Valea’s joyful choreography makes it hard to sit still.

They also, however, may have difficulty with the intermittent Spanish dialogue and lyrics. Atlantic recommends “El Otro Oz” for theatergoers 6 and older, but even adults who haven’t studied the language may find the mix occasionally confusing.

One point, though, is always clear: Not all travels end blissfully. In a vision conjured by the witch, Dora witnesses the difficult migration her widowed mother, alone and pregnant, made from Mexico. The versatile



WENDY MELLA CARREÑO

Arielle Gonzalez, who plays that maternal role and several others, sings a moving ballad that eventually becomes a mother-daughter duet. It shows that for many immigrants, a journey is one-way only. Home remains far away; all they can hope for is to carry its spirit into a new world for their children.

From left, Danny Lemache, Arielle Gonzalez, Eli Gonzalez, Nya Noemi and Adriel Jovian in “El Otro Oz.”