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- Stewart Oksenhorn / The Aspen Times

Review: Theatre Aspen's *Vices*: Gripping for the eyes, but not for the mind

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ASPEN — As staged by Theatre Aspen, “Vices: A Love Story” is a technical achievement worth considering. Between two ballet dancers, four singers, a live rock quartet onstage, screen projections and props, all interacting in various ways in Theatre Aspen’s small space, I was anticipating a collision, or at least a moment where coordination broke down and there was a mass of confusion. But by the end of the 70-minute, one-act show, not only were all the pieces intact, but it had added up to something visually and sonically cohesive, an integration of parts that occupied three dimensions and then some.

Choreography is the fundamental element of “Vices.” The dancers (Samantha Harvey and Matthew Steffens) engage in a romance, balanced between abstraction and emotional expression, that winds through most of the familiar stages of romantic coupling. They dance sad and sexy; they come together and drift apart. But this is also choreography on a bigger scale, on multiple planes, as Harvey and Steffens, both with beautiful bodies and a staggering amount of stamina, coordinate their movements with music and musicians, singers and set changes.

The theme of “Vices” isn’t nearly as cohesive and solid. The focus of the play never strays: It is, in a straightforward way, about vices, and how they get in the way of connection. The lengthy list of vices that are explored veers toward the obvious: smoking, texting, body enhancement surgery, chocolate. And there is also an obvious tone — comedic, but lightly so, as if the creators of the play — Michael Heitzman and Ilene Reid, who are credited with the story, with music and lyrics by those two, plus Susan Draus and Everett Bradley — were afraid of really confronting their audience on the subject of our habits and addictions.

Moreover, the perspective on vices never added up to a whole. Are we meant to make light of them? Recognize that they are an existential impediment to our fulfillment and connection? Simply a good prop to hang a night of song and dance on?

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