

TARA FIRMA

ACTOR SHINES IN SIMON HEATH'S EVOCATIVE PLAY ABOUT A STRIPPER WHO REFUSES TO STRIP

BY GLENN SUMI

1002 NIGHTS by Simon Heath, directed by Tanja Jacobs, with Tara Rosling. Presented by the Shed Co. at the Cameron House (408 Queen West). Runs to December 1, Tuesday-Saturday 7:30 pm, matinee Sunday 2:30 pm. \$16-\$18, Sunday pwc. 416-703-1725. Rating: NNNN

If you're going to write a play with overexposed themes like the power of storytelling and the imagination, it'd better be damned compelling. Simon Heath's 1002 Nights is, and that's as much due to the glowing performance by Tara Rosling and subtle directing of Tanja Jacobs as it is to the vivid, multi-layered script.

Rosling plays Stella, a young stripper at a crossroads. Sensitive, raucous and street-savvy, she's decided to give up stripping and deliver another kind of performance.

Inspired by the Arabian Nights' Scheherazade, who kept herself alive by telling stories, Stella reveals tricks of the peeler trade, bittersweet personal anecdotes and an ongoing urban parable about a dancer and a gay man she calls the "fairy prince."

The question of which stories are true and which are embellished adds to the work's teasing, seductive power. Heath's playing with concepts like narrator reliability and the push-pull of the performer-audience contract.

The back room of the Cameron House makes an evocative setting. Andy Moro's set and lighting let us glimpse shadows and half-truths, while Claudia Moore's choreography -- which includes belly dancing and tap -- tells us as much about Stella's inner life as Heath's sophisticated script.

In the centre spotlight is Rosling, who peels away bravado and defences to reveal emotion. She never talks down to her character and doesn't mess things up with fussy mannerisms.

It's a heartbreaking performance in an exquisite solo play.