

WORRY WARTS: PERFORMANCE (CONVERGENCE THEATRE)

2019 SUMMERWORKS REVIEW

AUGUST 19, 2019 ILANA LUCAS

Worry Warts, presented by Convergence Theatre at the 2019 SummerWorks Performance Festival, is an experience in two parts; the first, detailed in a previous review, included a short interview and activities about the things that keep your heart rate up and your eyes open at night.

The company then took the 147 recorded interviews and cut excerpts of them together to create a performance piece, or “sharing,” for the last weekend of the festival. Interviewees received a ticket to the performance, booked separately, with limited tickets available to others. It’s fascinating to hear what other people are nervous about, and the “sharing” feels like just that – an attempt to make us feel less alone in our fears.

The mood of the sharing is, appropriately or ironically, that of a “relaxed” performance. The large company of actors, including two children, sit on the same exercise balls on which the interviews were conducted, so that they can feel either the same grounding or displacement that their subjects did.

In a giving gesture – they *are* about to reveal some of our deepest anxieties, after all – the actors tell us about their personal relationships with anxiety, as well as their family background; this leads to theories of the “epigenetics” of worry – that is, the concept that generational trauma can be baked into our very DNA.

Each of the six sharings is slightly different, but all involved taking the audience through the interview process, and the subsequent craft activities done by the participants, reading a range of representative answers to each segment off clipboards. The feeling is of documentary theatre – as the interviews were recorded, exact wordings are preserved, including linguistic tics and pauses.

The company does a great job of capturing the individual voices, some trying to preserve the character of the original speaker, some adopting a more detached affect. The readings also get mileage out of young people – or, as one puts it, people “on the journey to becoming a worry wart, AKA an adult” – incongruously speak commentary behind their years.

Most of the questions and answers are relatable in one way or another, veering from the fears themselves and healthy and less-healthy coping strategies, to discussions of social and social media anxiety. Even having been interviewed, I was surprised to discover that there were up to seven non-icebreaker questions, as I hadn't gotten past the first two.

Some answers border on the traumatic, and some are very funny, and the editors are keenly aware of when space is needed for processing, and when the mood needs to be lightened. Many of the passages are thoughtful and elegant, particularly a climactic story about the nature of grief bumping up against the indomitable human spirit. Regardless of tone, they're read with warmth and compassion; important, as it soothes the momentary embarrassment of hearing your own words read out.

Each interviewee used a fake name, but even those names were taken off the excerpts to further anonymize them. Instead, the production issues a cascade of "end credits", names and ages flowing over each other like a waterfall. I thought the effect was rather beautiful; it showcased the sheer number of people behind these words, many of whom were in the room.

Worry Warts is a cathartic experience even more than a theatre piece. As the cast broke out into an a cappella rendition of The Beach Boys' "Don't Worry Baby," I found tears prickling behind my eyes. "Doubt is a really good thing to hold," said one anonymous interview subject. Even better, while you're doubting, to hold in your heart the fact that you're not alone.

This review is a snapshot of the first performance of a work-in-progress. The production is one of several pieces at the festival presented as part of the SummerWorks Lab programming introduced in 2018. The participants in SW Lab are still in the development process and will continue to evolve throughout the festival.

<https://www.mooneyontheatre.com/2019/08/19/worry-warts-performance-convergence-theatre-2019-summerworks-review/#more-53564>