

TERMINUS

Torn Space
at the Central Terminal

Melissa Meola, who played the central role, with visiting actors Chris Standart and Matthew LaChiusa.

Cast-members Sharon Strait, Ryan O'Bryne and Bonita Z.

Set builder John F. Kennedy with director/author Dan Shanahan and audio, video and set designer Aaron Miller.

THE FULL MONTY

ArtPark

Star Loraine O'Donnell-Gray, director-choreographer Lynne Kurdziel-Formato and star Lisa Ann Ludwig.

Ann Mosner, who plays Jeanette; Rob Richardson, who stars as Jerry; with Michael Formato.

Monty boys Tom Owen, Lou Calaiacovo and Bobby Cooke.

BY ANTHONY CHASE



TERMINUS

Terminus, the new Dan Shanahan piece currently being performed at the Central Terminal picks up on his earlier work, *Muriel Vanderbilt Goes Walking*, as the central character, Muriel, played by Melissa Meola, "confronts four stages of herself." The event takes full advantage of its spectacular Central Terminal setting with a poetic and ambitious venture into audio- and video-enhanced performance.

Shanahan's vision for his Torn Space company blazes a wide path across the theatrical landscape, and with *Terminus* he pushes his efforts beyond the limits of pure theater into performance art. *Terminus* is not built on narrative or characters in conflict. Instead, like poetry, the piece is constructed of compelling images which evoke great power while they resist definitive understanding. These visual moments are often quite arresting, as when Sharon Strait, as Mother, stands in a large, lighted dress structure at the far end of the terminal, beneath the gigantic arch of window and sings; or when Ryan O'Bryne, as Harold, enters the space from the far end of the room, dragging a large, rolling cart into the space, stops to untie the Human Sacrifice, played by Tim McPeck, and continues on his way. Shanahan often uses Bonita Z to excellent effect (she appeared in *Muriel Vanderbilt Goes Walking*) and here perches her high atop of a staircase in a sort of expressionistic high chair.

These moments are potent with possible interpretation but defy perfect comprehension. A great part of the pleasure of the performance is audience efforts to penetrate profoundly personal and cryptic material that makes use of images common to all of us. Aaron Miller's excellent audio, video and set designs deserve particular mention. At a number of points, I momentarily mistook his digital

images for living people. His work greatly enriches *Terminus*, an environmental experience that begins when the audience first enters Central Terminal through a corridor of fluorescent lamps and does not lag until the final unsettling moment. In addition to those mentioned above, the able cast includes Candace Lukasik as Muriel's Younger Self; GregGreg and Dan Toner as Bonita Z's fellow Custodians; Becky Globus as Protective Figure; and Kara McKenny as Mother Goddess.

THE FULL MONTY

The first locally produced production of the David Yazbek-Terrence McNally musical *The Full Monty* demonstrates what a nicely constructed show it is. Set in Buffalo in the recent past, *The Full Monty* follows a group of out-of-work steelworkers who decide to put on a Chippendales-style strip show to earn some quick cash.

At Artpark, under the direction of Lynne Kurdziel-Formato, who also supplies the choreography, the show benefits from its local resonance in a region that has seen better economic times. The second scene, featuring a group of men grousing at their union representative, played with palpably greater reality than either the Broadway production or the national tour.

Lynne Kurdziel-Formato has directed with great insight and clarity, and enlivens the show with her trademark choreography, which keeps the evening moving briskly. The mostly local cast is also quite excellent, with particularly fine performances in some particularly nice roles for Loraine O'Donnell as lovelorn working-class wife Georgie Bukatinsky; Lisa Ann Ludwig as the boss's materialistic spouse, Vicki Nichols; and Ann Mosner as showbiz workhorse Jeanette Burmeister. Lou Colaiacovo and Bobby Cooke distinguish themselves as the offbeat local boys who find love after several hilarious diversions in other directions. Tom Owen provides mirthful insight to the stuffed-shirt boss who loosens up as poverty teaches him what is truly important. Michele Roberts and Doug Weyand lend a serious, but ultimately lighthearted weight to the central character's plight.

As the leading character, visiting artist Rob Richardson is tremendously appealing and convincingly holds his own among a crew of Buffalo's most experienced musical theater performers. He gives the role of Jerry, a guy who's got to earn some cash or lose custody of his son, great humanity and lovability, despite his apparent failings. Jay Dref gives a fine performance as Nathan Lukowski, a young man wise beyond his years.

Tyrone Grant is wonderful as Noah "Horse" T. Simmons, a role created around the talents of André De Shields. His rendition of "Big Black Man" is an evening highlight. Todd Horman is marvelously endearing as insecure but well-intentioned Dave Bukatinsky.

The show plays very well, and even in the large Artpark auditorium inspired obvious enthusiasm and compassion in its audience.