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The same cannot be said of *Aurélia's Oratorio*, whose four remaining performances in the Emmett Robinson are said to be so stuffed the Pope couldn't score a seat with a pocketful of C-notes and indulgences. After my experience with it last night, I can understand why. People have dangerous relationships to the inanimate objects in *Aurélia's Oratorio*, and appearances are deceiving. Props have personalities, mundane items throb with life, and even the set dressing gets up and goes when you least expect it. The red velvet curtains framing the proscenium become a central character in the magical, mostly wordless show, and remarkable things happen in their folds and lofty reaches. Aurélia Thierrée rides the blood-colored drapery like a blonde, silken djinn, slipping into and out of their embrace with an acrobatic elan. It seems a dream world set to accordions, chamber music, and gypsy jazz, which is precisely what Thierrée – a granddaughter of Charlie Chaplin – has in mind with her 90-minute (and too short at that) French circus theatre performance. The illusion- and surrealism-filled vignettes of *Oratorio* cast a spell on audience members very much like a waking dream, in which a world of impossibilities and opposites reigns. Shadows walks across the stage casting human beings in their wake, kites fly people, an audience of puppets applauds a human head performing for them, a trenchcoat tussles with its owner, dragging him about the stage and giving him a pummeling. In one enchanting sequence, which takes place behind a cascading waterfall of white lace curtains, an elaborate lace creature appears to snap at Thierrée's foot; it pulls away and her entire leg seems to unravel, leaving just a threadworn stump. Unconcerned, she produces a pair of knitting needles and knits her lace leg back together from thigh to frilly toes.

It's a different kind of illusion from that flourished by Steve Cuiffo in *Major Bang*, but even more mysterious – for while we know how it is done, we marvel at our own willingness to fool ourselves into thinking we don't. That, friend, is good theatre.