

'Aurelia's Oratorio' leaves audience smiling

By Carol Furtwangler

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Leave it to the French to bring us the most inventive, clever and downright entertaining show of Spoleto Festival 2007. "Aurelia's Oratorio" purely delighted a sold-out audience at the College of Charleston's Emmett Robinson Theatre on Thursday night. I did not see a single patron who left without a smile. To a quirky, diverse soundtrack that includes cabaret, jazz, classical and more, two characters perform before our very eyes tricks that go beyond magic and stunts and seem impossible. Aurelia Thierree is the central performer and namesake of the piece. This attractive young lady comes by her talent and skill honestly — Her mother, Victoria Thierree Chaplin, daughter of Charlie Chaplin, created and directed this spectacle, and Aurelia has been practicing her craft on stage since early childhood. She also happens to be the great-granddaughter of Eugene O'Neill. There is not a word spoken, with the exception of co-star Julio Monge calling out her name at unpredictable intervals. In fact, everything is unpredictable, exemplifying the long tradition of illusion and visual wit we used to call sight gags — and quelles surprises! Monge is a stunning dancer who is also a classical actor. He uses every bit of his twenty years of experience on stage, in film and in television to act, dance, wrestle and charm his way through this demanding role. While I would not spoil your enjoyment of this production by giving anything away, suffice to say there is a dresser out of which come any number of limbs. They dance (and do other things) with clothes until you are sure there's somebody in there. The snow scene with giant puppets is beautiful and touching. The company brought its own rigging, so in addition to chills and thrills far above the stage, the kite flies the girl. There is a new take on a Punch and Judy show. An hourglass takes on a new meaning, and wait until you see where the train goes. Grab the kids — not too young — and treat yourself to 70 minutes of the most fun you'll have in a theater this year.