



Sam Chardin

Fringe fest chamber opera

One of the great joys of being an artist is knowing other creators and seeing their new works on opening night.

I briefly worked with talented Roan Shankaruk who is leaving us shortly to study with Tracy Dahl at the University of Manitoba. But before jetting off, Roan created a chamber opera now showing at the Vancouver Fringe Festival entitled *The Woman Who Borrowed Memories* that I encourage you to attend.



The Woman Who Borrowed Memories, Melodie Corbett and Roan Shankaruk

Based on a short story by beloved Finnish writer Tove Jansson, *The Woman Who Borrowed Memories* is akin to the campy thriller film *Single White Female* crossed with the music and mood of *Riders to the Sea*.

It's rare to see opera that passes The Bechdel Test as this one manages to do. This is essentially two women in an increasingly claustrophobic room discussing old times and old flames and old friends with a pervasive sense of menace. Even discussions about men, the unseen ex boyfriend Sebastian for instance, takes on a glint of potential violence.

Ultimately, Roan creates an exploration of gentle madness, the kind that keeps many women locked inside a prison of their own making. Her Wanda character, safe in her small apartment behind multiple locks, reminds me most of Miss Havisham. Havisham and Wanda are visions of horror written specifically to spook women. A future unfulfilled – passion tamped down or else merely borrowed. Or worse – stillborn. Wanda's inertia threatens to drown anyone who falls into her vortex of anxiety and toxic nostalgia.

Roan succeeded in sending a chill up my spine with merely two women singing to each other in a small room. Brava.



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