

# Night Train to Foggy Bottom a journey of discovery

By LINDA RITZ  
Standard Staff

It's a lot like going to sleep and tumbling slow-w-w-ly into wonderland.

It's a fanciful dream. It's a nightmare. It's a fantastic journey into the unknown. Things are not always as they appear, and sometimes they change before your very eyes.

And when you awake, unravelling the drama is another exciting and challenging adventure.

Theatre Beyond Words takes its audience through such a wonderland of fantasy, mystery and eroticism in its stunning world

premiere of Night Train to Foggy Bottom, which opened last night at the Royal George Theatre in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The special co-production with Coad Canada Puppets of Vancouver is utterly enchanting. It leaves some contemplating the fantasy's plot, symbols and devices. Others delight in the intrigue of the moment. That was clearly the creators' intention. Like most abstract art, it doesn't dictate patterns and relationships, but inspires independent thinking.

The story revolves around an artist's fantastic journey of self-discovery. He finds himself caught up in a series of dream

sequences in which he explores, presumably, symbolic elements of his past, present and future.

The concept and its delivery are brilliant. The story is mysterious, funny, curious, fascinating and captivating — and so intriguing that its secrets must be guarded.

Like most of Theatre Beyond Words' shows, Night Train is visually oriented. Each exquisite mask, created by Arlyn Coad, defines a distinctive personality, from nasty to virginal.

Master puppetry and projections, also conceived by Arlyn Coad, and engineered by Luman

Coad, and fascinating sound and special effects, further enhance the play's vitality. There is dialogue, but it isn't scripted in the usual sense.

Harro Masko, hailed as one of Canada's best comic actors, portrays the dreamer. Susanne Merriam, Terry Judd, Charles P. Schott, and Melinda Little also turn out exotic interpretations of abstract roles.

But Night Train's surreal element runs deeper than the masterful performances, deeper than its special effects or striking imagery. It's built into the production's very structure and

design.

Costumes by Warren Hartman, head of design at Brock University, pick up the concept where the masks leave off. Whimsical, forboding, dreamy and elaborate, their designs and textures not only echo the show's abstract nature, they enhance it.

So do the sometimes minimal props and sets constructed by David Satterthwaite, who doubles as stage manager.

It is without question an adult piece, although its erotic elements lack neither taste nor purpose. Every scene is a thrill

to watch, in particular the metamorphosis of a chest of drawers.

The company began conceptualizing the show last spring with Coad Canada Puppets, a husband-and-wife team, says David Paquet, managing director for Theatre Beyond Words.

He says Night Train is the company's most expensive show to date.

The show continues through Dec. 30. Theatre Beyond Words' second show in its winter season features the popular Potato People in Double Play, opening Dec. 9.