

THE AUSTIN

CHRONICLE

Lisa D'Amour: Slabber

BY Lisa D'Amour
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New Orleans, LA

Just returned from the National Rent-a-Car to pick up the Chevy Cavalier which will bring me to Austin for two weeks to work on SLABBER with Katie Pearl. It is a shiny gray platinum and not nearly as fancy as the white Ford that Katie and I drove from Minneapolis to Austin after the Minneapolis production of SLABBER. Why am I renting a car? Because my poor '91 Eagle Summit can't make the long drive downriver to my hometown anymore.

Why am I going to FronteraFest? Because last October, Vicky Boone, using about 20 words, convinced me it had to happen.

The Minneapolis SLABBER was a huge, indoor/outdoor performance installation which involved everything from street vendors to hieroglyphs, from ringing telephones to tubs filled with holy water. Not exactly a piece that travels easily. So when I called Vicky to tell her that time and circumstances would not allow me to come to FronteraFest, she replied, "Why don't you develop a super-portable version that can fit into a few suitcases? Then you could perform at the festival in New Orleans, hop in the car, and perform in Austin, too." Immediately, the wheels in my head started turning -- Katie and I designed this piece to be adapted to fit the space and circumstances in which it is performed. The circumstances which have arisen are: The piece must travel. Like a pilgrim with her parcels tied about her, the piece must travel efficiently. Like a girl heading downriver in search of home, the piece must travel swiftly --

Before I knew it, I was making arrangements to be away from Minneapolis for the month of January to develop this new "study" of SLABBER.

What will this new study be like, besides RADICALLY DIFFERENT from the last? We know the piece will be performed in five different locations, with the audience learning the location a few minutes before the show begins. We know the piece will fit neatly into seven suitcases, to be "unpacked" before the audience. We know the spine of the story -- a fable of an outcast little girl -- will remain the same. Everything else is up for grabs. Am I terrified? A little. Terrified, but somehow safe, for bringing SLABBER to Austin feels alot like bringing the piece home.

Yes, coming to Austin in January feels like bringing SLABBER home, even though the piece began in Minneapolis, thanks to a generous grant from the Jerome Foundation and Intermedia Arts. Katie and I dreamed up the piece over e-mails and in Minneapolis during rehearsals for the Intermedia production, but the essence of the piece always seemed "genuine Austin" to me. "Genuine Austin" has something to do with GETTING CLOSE and MAKING ROOM. Getting Close to the audience, both physically and emotionally. Making room for intimate exchange between performer and audience. Getting close, really close, to the objects that make up the world of the performance. Making room for new experiences, new text, new risks to appear each performance. And most of all, never EVER being afraid of GETTING CLOSE and MAKING ROOM.

I am happy that we premiered such a piece in Minneapolis -- a town whose impressive theatre scene can sometimes feel stiff and distant in its professionalism. And I am thrilled to be bringing the piece home to Austin in hand-me-down suitcases, duct-taped boxes, and wax-sealed jelly jars packed carefully in the trunk of a rental car which tomorrow will speed right on past Houston in favor of fresh springs and big cheap theatre. ...