



Opinionist: *Terrible Things*



Justin Bernhaut

Those Tibetan Buddhists who spend their days toiling over sand mandalas are going about it all wrong—they'd have a lot more fun making *marshmallow* mandalas instead. Lovers of those gelatinous white sugar puffs will be alternately tantalized and tortured by *Terrible Things*, a new theatrical dance piece that just opened [at Performance Space 122](#). Upon entering the theater, an army of 1,000 marshmallows are found arrayed on stage in orderly rows. It's a simple pattern, but a hypnotic one, and as the performance unfolds, three female dancers meticulously herd the marshmallows into ever-evolving patterns. Only two are eaten, and none are offered to the audience.

Why marshmallows? Well, that's not exactly clear, but when it comes to work by Katie Pearl and Lisa D'Amour, "why," is typically eclipsed by "wow." In 2007, their site-specific show *Bird Eye Blue Print* turned an abandoned downtown office space at the World Financial Center into a portal to another universe, unleashing a swirl of idiosyncratic dance, oblique poetry, and absurd humor. Though not as immersive as that production, *Terrible Things* still sneakily transports the audience into a surreal, temporary astonishment zone.

The marshmallows are really just one small part of it. The text, written by longtime collaborators [Pearl and D'Amour](#), is spoken entirely by Pearl, who directly addresses the audience for much of the show, while the dancers hustle around rearranging marshmallows and intertwining. The choreography by [Emily Johnson](#) (who also performs in the piece) is an imaginative mix of angular obsessiveness, lunging, tangling, and indescribable contortions. Center stage, Pearl unspools eccentric stories about all her turbulent romantic relationships, which eventually expand to include everyone who just bought a ticket—at least until they're dumped with the line, "Did you notice that I just broke up with all of you?"

It's all very amusing and fascinating, but after a while I began to wish for just a bit more friction. Then [SPOILER!] two college wrestlers (NYU and Hunter) ambled in wearing singlets and took turns wrestling spunky little Katie Pearl, whose diminutive height is a recurring theme in *Terrible Things*. It wasn't quite a "wow!" moment, but it was hilariously "WTF?!" After pinning her, the two lumbering jocks incongruously joined the dancers/marshmallow herders for the duration of the performance. Why not? As Pearl herself put it, "Anything is possible and everything is happening."

Terrible Things [continues at PS 122 through December 20th](#).