



Return to what's inside

The Trip drifts in and out of *All the Rooms of the House* in world premiere

by Jeff Smith, May 20, 2014 / *San Diego Reader*

Beginning this Thursday, May 22, and running only through Sunday — that's all the rent they can afford — The Trip presents the world premiere of Tom Dugdale's *All the Rooms of the House*. It's about three siblings who return to their family home after 12 years away. "They find everything gone and their mother nowhere to be found."

That's the "storyline," but as in the company's other stagings, the piece will venture far beyond the confines of a linear "plot" and conventional theater.

"Each actor plays a fixed character in the Present," says Dugdale, and other characters as well. Original music, performed live, will make it "a concert for a place forgotten."

“So much theater is hung up on what the audience will ‘get,’” says Dugdale, co-founder of The Trip and winner of the prestigious Grace Le Vine (“Princess Grace”) Theatre Award for 2012. “But if you try to predict a reaction, you will inevitably be wrong – or, at the very least the work will be stale, packaged, finished.

“I believe in a theater that trips ahead of our ability to make total sense of it. Stop to analyze and on some fundamental neurotransmitter level you shut off the possibility of emotional response.”

As in their *Our Town*, which received a seven-page spread in the prestigious Theatre/Forum, issue 44, and their recent The Trip’s *Macbeth*.

This was not the Scottish Play. It was more like an event, or a happening made from whatever was handy. The actors were themselves and their characters at the same time — or themselves always, and the characters would drift in and out of them.

The 75-minute piece had the requisite solemnity, at times. But it was also as buoyant as the colored balloons bouncing on the floor. And throughout it extended a gentle invitation to join in — not dragged on stage and audience-participate with goofy business, but glide with the ride, knowing that the rollercoaster’s tracks wouldn’t quit at the top of the climb.

It was, as we used to say in sunnier times, “a trip.”

“We are still living in the aftermath of postmodernism and the everything-is-possible-therefore-nothing-is-possible mentality,” says Belgian artist Jan Lauwers, a major influence on Dugdale. “In those days, art liked being under a cloud. But art is tough, and the greatest illusion art has ever come up with is that it is not essential.”

“Postmodernism was concerned with the packaging,” says Dugdale. “It’s time to return to what’s inside — and make performance about not ‘performing’.”

As in postmodern, or Hans-Thies Lehmann’s more encompassing term, “postdramatic” theater, the play is not the thing. “How we work together and rally around it,” says Trip co-founder Joshua Brody, “that is the ‘play.’”

Including the audience. The Trip extends an invitation: the “play” — in both senses of the term — is a pretext for people to get together.

“We as performers and you as audience are here. And we are here now.”

And leave conceptions of traditional theater in the lobby.

Dugdale and other “post-post-modern” writers/directors are moving theater from a five- to a twelve-tone scale. Words still communicate, but sounds can just as much, and music, and gestures. There is no favored means of expression.

Expect it, in fact, where you least expect it.

The darndest part of this approach: it's upbeat. Jan Lauwers founded the Belgian group [NEEDCOMPANY](#) because he literally needed company.

“It was that simple for him,” says Dugdale. “He realized he couldn't make work without people: people to perform it, people to come see it.”

Lauwers also formed the group to show that, while much theater proclaims “man is doomed,” or “is his own downfall,” he wanted to throw light on the other side, “to show that people aren't so bad” after all.”