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Inside The Times



LEE CELANO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

URBAN THEATER From left, Niko Tsocanos, Elizabeth Carena and Tori Sparks in "Roadside Attractions," an outdoor performance in Lower Manhattan. Review by Alastair Macaulay. PAGE C7

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Family Camping Trip Packed With Phantom Selves, Hopes and Dreams

You never feel quite the same way about a public place once you've seen dance happening in it. Space and architecture that are usually governed by ordinary pedestrian activities become transformed by movement — sometimes by music and drama, too.

ALASTAIR
MACAULAY

DANCE
REVIEW

People working around Brookfield Place Plaza — a Lower Manhattan space on the Hudson side of what was formerly the World Financial Center — had the chance in late June to watch part of the genesis of an outdoor performance piece with live music. On the nights of June 16 through 22, the Third Rail Projects company presented open rehearsals for its new project, "Roadside Attraction"; on lunchtimes from June 23 to Wednesday it performed successive quarter-hour episodes of the production. I caught up with it this past Thursday afternoon, when I attended the full premiere of the hourlong production.

The fun of "Roadside Attraction" is that much of it is very ordinary. It gives us a cartoon American family — dad, mom, two daughters and the younger girl's boyfriend — in their Coleman pop-up camper. They sunbathe, they eat meals, the men go fishing, the boyfriend goes for a run.

The first clue any dance is going to be involved is tiny: the mother, coming out of the van,

"Roadside Attractions" repeats on Monday and Tuesday at 12:30 p.m. at One New York Plaza, Water Street near Broad Street, Lower Manhattan; thirdrailprojects.com.



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Roadside Attraction From left, Niko Tsocanos, Tori Sparks, Tara O'Con, Rebekah Morin and Carlton Cyrus Ward in this outdoor performance piece.

hunches her shoulders rhythmically. But she's going through plenty of midlife frustration — and she has an avatar, a look-alike alter ego with whom she explores a few fantasies. All the dance stays close to ordinary

movement, but the choreography takes everyday impulses and makes them lyrically potent.

The piece is tightly integrated. There are two musicians (Sean Hagerty and Isaiah Singer) at the side of the action, but the Avatar

does much of the singing, and the dancer/musician borderline stays blurry on purpose. The author is Jennine Willett, with Zach Morris and Tom Pearson; those three are also the Third Rail artistic directors.

Mainly this is social comedy. The mother (Tori Sparks) keeps trying to gain any attention she can from her bland husband (Carlton Cyrus Ward). She even stretches in front of him like a cat in heat. When she asks him to put

suntan lotion on her shoulders, he does so while continuing to read his book. Sometimes her avatar (Elizabeth Carena) echoes her every move; sometimes the two women have separate activities in separate zones. Later her attention roams to her daughter's hunky boyfriend (Niko Tsocanos). Here her avatar, invisible to others, inserts herself erotically into the boyfriend's workout.

Mother and avatar are look-alikes, with the same manes of auburn curls, the same sleeveless

An outdoor fantasy piece centers on family dynamics and a pop-up camper.

scarlet tops and white shorts (costumes are by Karen Young). But in an unnerving twist, they emerge at one point from the camper transformed — in matching platinum-blond wigs and leopard-print outfits. This does have the desired effect — the husband finally pays attention. What's touching is that this is far from melodramatic.

Their story is just the most serious thread in a tale in which all the characters have individual opportunities. The movement shows which parts of life are routine and which fantasy. I would have preferred it all being even tighter, naughtier, more surreal, but it covers quite a range, from satire to real pain, with an eloquence that stays in the memory.\