



CENTERSTAGE

By Cat Altman

What you may have missed

I feel a little uneasy about reviewing Bobbie Louise Hawkins' performance of *Life As We Know It*—mainly because her sharp-tongued, insightful prose made me feel more the eager student than the skeptical critic, but also because this weekend's performance was the last showing in Boulder. So why read a review about a show that's already over? Because Hawkins offers a powerful voice that resonates with clarity and passion during this confusing time, and I take decent notes.

The set, designed by Brandi Mathis, was simple. An armchair draped in white cloth sat in front of a table with a carafe of water, a lamp, a water glass, and a tall shot glass. The Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art's small theater-in-the-round made the setting intimate, and when the soft spotlight illuminated the stage, there was a nostalgic sensation of sitting in a circle for story-time. The old 1950s song "Life is But a Dream" filled the room as Bobbie Louise Hawkins walked onstage and sat in the chair. After the music stopped, she continued to sing and her confidence reassured us that this was someone who'd been around the block a few times and could pull off a one-woman show for an hour and a half sans intermission.

Hawkins grew up in West Texas, studied art in England, attended university in Tokyo, then taught in British Honduras. She has written 15 books of prose and poetry and a one-hour play called *Back to Texas*. She was invited to the "One World Poetry" festival in Amsterdam and was awarded a fellowship in literature by the National Endowment for the Arts. During the 1980s she traveled through the United States and Canada with folk singer Rosalie Sorrells and jazz singer Terry Garthwaite, performing musicale readings. Hawkins has written and taught at Naropa University where, at the invitation of poet Anne Waldman, she began the prose concentration at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poets. *Life As We Know It* marks her return to the BMOCA stage and she certainly came back with a lot to say.

Hawkins spent a good portion of her talk deconstructing the creation myth, labeling Eden as "a little piece of executive perfection" and compar-

ing Adam, "a creature made in God's image," to Eve, "a modified rib with tits and legs and attitude." Then she launched into discussions that ranged from housekeeping and "to-do" lists to hilarious recollections of moments with Oliver North and critiques of the Kansas school board. The connecting thread of Hawkins' anecdotes and analyses was the idea that as a culture we spend our days and nights in a state of self-hypnosis. We delude ourselves into thinking that there are concrete, attainable answers and when life proves us wrong, we just grasp for new illusions. It's hard to summarize such complex ideas. Here's a few direct quotes strung together to take the pressure off.

"Despite all the evidence to the contrary, we have to keep on thinking we're hot stuff... We all want the plot thickened... Temptation and the maintenance of desire is the true mystery... You'd think our minds would have our interests at heart but... according to the Gallop poll, 74 percent of the population believes in the one and only true love... We are lemmings in a mob rushing to find 'happily ever after'... Everyone feels better when collective confusion can be given a name... What I really want to do is understand what's happening... I've been my kind of fool all my life and I'm not likely to stop any time soon... Understanding happens in

words later... Whenever you must, you will save your life, but... the monster is always there."

The tone wasn't depressing; on the contrary, Hawkins' voice was sharp-witted and empathetic. Her perceptions hit so close to home, it was almost like listening to one's inner voice aloud. Refrains of "Life is But a Dream" played throughout the show, making the line between what we know and what we think we know—which are our own ideas and which aren't—become increasingly fuzzy. Brandi Mathis' lighting created a subtle rhythm for the text and kept the stage visually engaging despite its simple set design. Bobbie Louise Hawkins' performance of *Life As We Know It* made me laugh, made me think, and made me reflect on personal, political and cultural levels. I'd see it again if I could, but fifteen of her books should keep me busy until her next performance. ②



Missing person: Bobbie Louise Hawkins.