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Photo by Rachel Roberts

trying to catch the brass ring

Being is Believing

Alexandra Beller makes more smart, sweet and timely dance

By [SARAH CARLSON](#)
Offoffoff.com

The tiniest spotlight illuminates a solitary white egg. Alexandra Beller lies beside it, nudges it gently and then devours it... almost. That is to say that she takes said egg in her mouth and cradles it as she begins a series of carefully balanced gestures. Thus begins the premiere of Alexandra Beller's newest solo, *egg*, a tribute to her son and to the maternal spirit he has brought forth in her.

Quickly the piece turns comical. A nature channel commentary introduces the throaty cry of a mother bird species protecting her nest. Beller adopts a one legged flamingo stance clearly ready to pounce if necessary. But her pure white dress and liquid moves contrast starkly with the guttural croak of the mother bird. Suddenly, in a moment of distraction the precious egg drops.

But not to worry, there are plenty more eggs to care for. Sexy tricksters toss out more and more, almost daring Beller to drop another. Throughout the piece the stage becomes positively littered with them. As Beller struggles to tend to them all, the tension mounts. She barely misses stepping on them as she darts in between attempting to continue her progressively harried dance.

Smart, sweet and exceedingly timely, *egg* is a witty nod at motherhood. Dashing to rescue members of her ensemble before they stumble, Beller is a caregiver, a fix-it gal, a would-be savior. But she is pushed to the edge as she multitasks and sometimes... she fails. Alas, to be a mother is to be tender, daring and decidedly imperfect. To be a mother is to be deeply human.

ALEXANDRA BELLER: AFTER HAPPY

Dancers: Alexandra Beller, Tim Cusack, Toni Melaas, Milvia Berenice Pacheco Salvatierra, Edward Rice, Jenna Riegel.
Sound design by: Robert Poss.
Costumes by: Karen Young.
Lighting design by: Amanda K. Ringger.
Production stage manager: Justin Donham.

SCHEDULE

Abrons Arts Center
Henry Street Playhouse
May 7-10, 2009



Photo by Rachel Roberts

Beller's second premiere is no less clever but a wee bit too long. *what comes after happy* pokes fun at Western society's relentless pursuit of happiness and begins with a bang. As soon as the curtain drops on *egg*, Tim Cusack enlivens the audience with a pre-show pep talk worthy of any Tony Robbins conference: "What's gonna make you

happy? Take your passion and make it happen!" Meanwhile company members enter the house and pass out fortune cookies. Eagerly, they dole out luck to an economically challenged audience sorely in need of it.

Onstage, the piece depicts a suite of characters searching for happiness: some look for love, others lust, others attend a mock self-help session and chant the mantra, "Being is believing". More often than not, their attempt is aborted and ends awkwardly. A particularly entertaining sequence included the dancers lip-syncing their way through TV channel surfing. Tony Melaas and Edward Rice give a marvelous rendition of an old time Lana Turner love scene. The structure repeatedly reveals the extent to which we live vicariously through the imaginary happiness of fictitious characters.

Beller's easy movement style complements her message by projecting at times the loosey-goosey quality of a marionette. The dancers move fluidly, almost as if they have no joints to bind their limbs; it's as if they can't control their own destiny, never mind their happiness. And in the end, this is the message of the piece. After just one or two too many scenes, Beller closes the piece by revealing the artifice of these modes of seeking. Before we can believe in our being, we must remember to take time to simply be.

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