

The New York Times

THEATER

Review: Dreaming of ‘Home,’ With a Magical Guide in His Underwear

NEXT WAVE FESTIVAL: HOME

NYT Critic’s Pick

Off Broadway, Play, Experimental/Perf. Art, Dance Play

1 hr. and 35 min.

Closing Date: December 10, 2017

Brooklyn Academy of Music - Harvey Theater, 651 Fulton St., 718-636-4100

By **BEN BRANTLEY** DEC. 7, 2017



Members of the audience incorporated into a birthday party scene in Geoff Sobelle’s “Home” at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Credit Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

Geoff Sobelle knows where you dream. Even more unsettlingly, he knows that territory you inhabit on the edge of dreams — when you’re suddenly half-awake in the middle of the night and aren’t sure where you are.

You’re home, right? Or so you try to reassure yourself, as you squint to make out familiar objects in the dark. But which of the many homes and way stations you’ve slept in is this one?

Before your real location has come into focus, you've taken mental inventory of a whole succession of beds, occupied by different versions of you, at different ages, perhaps in combination with different partners.

Yeah, I know, Proust wrote all about this stuff in the opening pages of [“Remembrance of Things Past.”](#) (“For a long time I used to go to bed early,” it begins.) But don't think I've ever seen this particular form of nocturnal disorientation summoned as evocatively — on a stage, in real (unreal) time — as it is in “Home,” Mr. Sobelle's essential new performance piece at the [Brooklyn Academy of Music.](#)

If you have any intention of seeing “Home,” which runs only through Sunday at the Harvey Theater, you might want to stop reading now. Part of the effectiveness of this latest offering from Mr. Sobelle, whose earlier credits include the inspired installation work [“The Object Lesson,”](#) relies on conjuring tricks.

This production, directed with a spontaneous air of seamlessness by Lee Sunday Evans, seems to keep pulling apparitions out of air, just as your mind does when it's feeling tired and unguarded. That semi-waking sensation I mentioned above is given full, fluid life early in the show, and it involves little more than a simple single bed, the middle-aged Mr. Sobelle and interchangeable alter-egos who include a towheaded boy, a young woman and an older woman.



Mr. Sobelle starting to build the structure that will become the home of the play's title.

Credit Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

The entire sequence lasts maybe five minutes, and yet it feels as if it covers not just your lifetime but those of at least several other people as well. And, oh, you know that other unnerving staple of nighttime fantasies, the one in which you're in a public place in your underwear?

Mr. Sobelle has that one covered (or uncovered), too, as he stands center stage in his white boxers and T-shirt, modestly draping himself in sheer plastic tarpaulins, looking both slightly alarmed and supremely regal. Watching him in such moments, you are sure to feel an embarrassed empathy for Mr. Sobelle, awash in your own instinctive fears of being on undignified and unprotected display.

Not to worry, though. Mr. Sobelle will soon have an entire house — custom built, room by room, before your astonished eyes — to shelter him. But how much of a sanctuary is a house, any house, finally?

Looked at from a longer view, which is how Mr. Sobelle's vision works, it's just a temporary refuge through which many travelers are probably destined to pass. As to any illusions you might have about the permanence of where you lay your hat, well, just remember that anything that can be assembled can be leveled even more quickly.

I wasn't speaking in metaphors about that house being built onstage. At the center of Steven Dufala's uncanny set for "Home" is a two-story suburban-style dwelling (with complete kitchen and bathroom). Even though you watch it being put together, it still seems to materialize of the shadows, just like the place you once lived with Mom and Dad, as it shows up in your dreams.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that this house is private property. This building belongs if not to the ages, at least to several successive generations of tenants.



Sophie Bortolussi, left, and Jennifer Kidwell, center, in the crowded kitchen of "Home." Credit Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

These folks go about their daily business of brushing their teeth, taking out the garbage, unclogging the toilet, changing clothes and putting away the groceries, just as you or I might on an average, boring day. But they do it in multiples, so that as many as seven people are inhabiting the house at the same time, performing much the same tasks, but unaware of one another's existence.



Further developments in the construction of "Home." Credit Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

And that's before things get really crowded.

"Home" admits to a cast of only seven, including Mr. Sobelle. That is a deceptive number. You are a cast member, too, whether you wind up on the stage or not. (And be warned: that is a possibility, but nothing that involves you in your underwear.)

A highly skilled creative team, which includes Christopher Kuhl (lighting) and Brandon Wolcott (sound), extends the borders of this work's title property through subliminal sensory effects. After all, as Mr. Sobelle points out in a written introduction in the program, there's a reason that theaters are referred to as houses; they are places where we settle in for a spell, as occupants and owners of seats we presumptuously think of as "ours."

If you are not the first person ever to live where you are living now, "Home" is guaranteed to elicit a familiar sense of being haunted. Surely on some level, conscious or not, you've thought about the existences that preceded yours in this spot, and felt both their weight and their ephemerality.

Those who like anchors of annotation with their artistic experiences will be pleased to learn that this production features a alto-harp and guitar-strumming troubadour in the form of [Elvis Perkins](#), who shows up to sing gnomically of the follies of identifying too closely with our places of residence.

Mr. Perkins has a certain droll charm. But for me, his presence was superfluous. Mr. Sobelle and company have landscaped their ghost house so precisely as an of-the-moment phenomenon that no explanation is required.

And as I looked at the (spoiler) ruins of what was once a sturdy edifice as the show concluded, I cast a prophetic thought toward them, one I knew would be fulfilled: "I'll see you in my dreams."

Next Wave Festival: HOME

- NYT Critic's Pick

Brooklyn Academy of Music - Harvey Theater

651 Fulton St.

Brooklyn

718-636-4100

bam.org

Category Off Broadway, Play, Experimental/Perf. Art, Dance Play **Runtime** 1 hr. and 35 min.

Credits Created by Geoff Sobelle; Original music by Elvis Perkins; Directed by Lee Sunday Evans **Cast** Sophie Bortolussi, Josh Crouch, Jennifer Kidwell, Justin Rose, Geoff Sobelle and Ching Valdez-Arran

Opened December 6, 2017 **Closing Date** December 10, 2017

Upcoming Shows

Thursday	December 7	7:30 pm
Friday	December 8	7:30 pm
Saturday	December 9	7:30 pm
Sunday	December 10	3:00 pm

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/07/theater/home-geoff-sobelle-review.html>

The Guardian



'Buildings tell stories': how the housing crisis inspired an Edinburgh show

Geoff Sobelle riffs on cramped city living in his festival production *Home* by building a two-up, two-down from scratch and inviting the audience inside

Matt Trueman

Mon 13 Aug 2018 16.00 BST

When Geoff Sobelle went to lay a new kitchen floor, the theatremaker found the foundations of a new show. Pulling up the linoleum tiling, he uncovered another layer of linoleum. Beneath that, another still. “A linoleum club sandwich,” he laughs over a bread-heavy breakfast in the Ruhr, where he is performing at a German arts festival. “It was like an archaeological dig site - but just really banal.”

By the time he had finished stripping the room, he had seen his home’s history like stripes of sedimentary rock. “My house is my home, but it was someone else’s before that,” he stresses. “We share spaces in ways we don’t even see.”

Home, which is staged later this month at the Edinburgh international festival, is built around that idea. On the stage, a typical two-up, two-down house fills up with all its previous occupants at once. They line up at the fridge to swig juice from the carton and spin from shower to sink to stints on the toilet in a cyclone of ablutions. It makes for a crowded house - a comment on cramped city living and the ubiquity of urban lives.

Housing, as Sobelle knows well, is “a hot-button issue”. He lives in Brooklyn, New York, an area with an alarming rate of gentrification, but that is just one element of a global issue. By 2025, it is estimated that 1.6 billion people will live in substandard housing.

Given that, *Home* takes a light touch: it is a theatrical meditation on human habitation. Sobelle’s sister, a literature professor, specialises in “architecture as a form of narrative; the way buildings tell stories”. Inspired by her work, *Home* is a loose triptych in which Sobelle builds a basic structure, single-handedly, then moves in with actors from his theatre company and, most intriguingly, invites the audience to come up and make themselves at home, too. “It’s an illusion of a house,” he says. “Putting house and home together is always an illusion. It’s a dream.”



Cyclone of ablutions ... the overpopulated bathroom in Sobelle's *Home*. Photograph: Hillarie Jason

A fringe stalwart, Sobelle has been coming to Edinburgh on and off for 20 years and has scored a string of sleeper hits along the way. The first was a silent-film spoof, *All Wear Bowlers*, in which two well-dressed wastrels – part Laurel and Hardy, part Vladimir and Estragon in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* – were spat out of a screen and on to the stage.

A graduate of Jacques Lecoq’s school in Paris, Sobelle combines clowning and illusion. “Comedy is the highest order of art, because it has to encompass tragedy or it’s not funny,” he says. He cites Jacques Tati and Charlie Chaplin as personal heroes. “You’re uplifted, but not in a saccharine way. You see all these truths of life, big and small, in their routines. In allowing us that, clowning is like the greatest sacrifice.”

His work tends to tease magic out of mundane reality, whether an office overtaken by nature in *Flesh and Blood & Fish and Fowl* or, in *The Object Lesson*, boxes of old junk packed for storage that contain the entirety of a man’s life.

In *Home*, he has added music to the mix. The US singer-songwriter Elvis Perkins (the son of the *Psycho* actor Anthony Perkins and the photographer Berry Berenson) floats through the show in a white suit and a wide-rimmed hat, playing plaintive folk songs. Sobelle and Perkins, both in their early 40s, were high school peers (and bandmates) in Los Angeles – a city that left a stain on each of them. “It’s built on make-believe,” Perkins says, his voice as soft as his songs. “It’s unreal.” Sobelle agrees; he sees LA as “a bit of a non-place, a city that shouldn’t be”.



'When he invites his audience up on stage, it is as if he makes a play by magic.' Photograph: Hillarie Jason

They both moved away years ago and settled in New York. On stage, Perkins is almost a haunting presence, never entirely at home in the house. It reflects his own sense of rootlessness. "I don't know if I really feel at home here, on this planet," he reflects. "I'm not sure I know where to call home." One of his lyrics, written on the way back from protesting at Standing Rock, spells out the point: "Your only home is in and out of your body." "Even that is temporary," he says. "Like any home."

In a sense, home is where the art is for Sobelle and Perkins. Touring for most of the year, they hop between gigs and festivals. Perkins talks of "inhabiting" music, of songs as "an architecture of sorts". Sobelle speaks similarly about theatre. "It's just creating a hospitable environment for people to come together," he says.

In his book *The Forest and the Field*, the theatremaker Chris Goode describes theatre as something you can live in - not only an art form, but also potentially a whole way of life. Sobelle's show manages, briefly, to make that manifest. When he invites his audience on stage, steering them around the house with concealed instructions, it is as if he makes a play by magic. Guests greet each other like old friends and grab bottles out of cupboards. But there comes a point when it stops being a play and becomes a real party all of its own - with drinking, dancing and fancy dress.

"You know what?" Sobelle laughs again. "People always gravitate towards the kitchen. I love that. It's not a real kitchen, but that's just how people are at parties."

Home is at King's theatre, Edinburgh, from 22-26 August

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