

## James's Gotta Brand New Blog

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### **Weekend arts report: Jan Andrews & Jennifer Cayley tell amazing stories**

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Ottawa storytellers Jan Andrews & Jennifer Cayley were telling amazing tales of their own lives & love, brought together by a passion for literature, at The Arts Project last week & said how storytelling hardly ever gets review. So I said well I can try...

...Early in their two-voices & several storied evening A Book of Spells, Jan Andrews & Jennifer Cayley recalled their astonishment, in early days, to think they might be lesbians. Both were married, one unhappily, one in a perfect marriage. At the beginning of their story.

Their penchant for discussings books - Doris Lessing, Timothy Findley, Jane Rule & more are mentioned - over dinners out had led to passionate discussions loud enough to still other diners' conversations . . . & eventually love & a period of what sounds like bonechilling hate & love again. Understated abandon. Intelligent love. Always the best romance tales.

That is their story & it is interwoven with the centrepiece of A Book of Spells, two stories by British writer Sara Maitland. The first, The Angelmaker (title approx). It is told from the point of view of the witch in Hansel & Gretel. She is revealed as a powerful, solitary figure in the forest whose confectioned cottage is an abortion clinic/fertility clinic among other things. (This is my interpretation from the seats at The Arts Project on Friday, the second night of their two-night gig). The witch encounters Gretel again & again as the little girl of the fairy tale grows into a woman in the modern world. This was told by Jan Andrews, whose voice & inflections convey beautifully arrived at sense & calm insight.

Jennifer Cayley told the second Maitland story, In Praise of Unknown Women & Our Mothers (title approx). Her voice & storytelling style conveys more wide-eyed wonder, passion turning from anger to love rather than irony on the way . . . which was appropriate to the story. It tells of a young girl who encounters two everyday life witches & learns about her own magic & flies over the other London to prove it.

(Both Maitland stories are apparently edited to suit the storytelling format).

The Arts Project is undergoing extensive renos (it still has a fine Sunfest-tied art exhibition in the main space ongoing). The result is that the place is damn cold of a night.

The two storytellers and The Arts Project folks contrived to overcome this. As the storytellers wryly observed, their own story can't really have a surprise ending. There the two of them are, decided to take their show on the road & see what crowds storytellers can pull. That's a hill still to climb, there were may be 20-25 of us @ TAP on Friday.

Magically & realistically, their own reconciliation seems to have begun over an empty bookcase . . . & they now have their own non-confectioned dwelling in the forests of

Easter Ontario to keep it real.

So that's my attempt at a review. I suggested coming back for The London Fringe - which didn't seem to light a bonfire or switch on a bulb - & they were off to Kitchener, where they had hoped to be part of other gay & lesbian events & that didn't seem to be happening. But it might down the road. The storytellers deserve another hearing on a warmer night with a bigger crowd if they touring this way again.

"Stories of Magic Realism by Sara Maitland" it says on the poster.

The realism is, for me, in the good bones of the old stories retold by somebody who loves them & the magic is in the beauty of the human voice, when it's telling a story it loves about somebody it loves.