



Founder and
Managing Editor
Dr. Anita R Ratnam

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Review

Are you listening? Avantika Bahl's "Say, What?"

- Sanjukta Wagh

e-mail: sanjuktawagh@gmail.com

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The premiere show was performed at the Mumbai Assembly on March 25, 2017. Two actors enter a blank space. They begin a conversation. The language is alien but the cadence and tone seem familiar. There is a sense of urgency and they both have an agenda and what seems like two diverse opinions. They drift apart or maybe just stop listening to each other as they trace the peripheries of the room. The distance between them seems to have grown. Apart from the sudden moments of what seems like coincidental harmony, they seem to be talking to themselves. They meet again and a more relaxed conversation happens. More playful and tongue in cheek. It's almost like they are playing games. Boundaries begin to appear. How close is too close? Can you catch me? Can we, may we, should we perhaps touch? They lounge about now allowing for silence to seep in and then an argument. One person seems to have stopped listening to the other trying their best to get attention by relating a long humorous anecdote. They meet again this time really listening to each other.



The actors, Avantika Bahl and Vishal Sarvaiyya make us read between their lines and bring alive moments of silence replete with meaning where communication truly happens. They tune us into our own prejudices and preconceived notions. They constantly make us challenge ourselves as viewers, bringing to our consciousness our own ways of seeing. The actors engage us for a whole hour and make us listen, really listen. In a world filled with cacophony, Avantika Bahl's "Say, What?" makes for an authentic theatrical experience which is as emotionally charged as it is intellectually provoking and viscerally immersive.

Sanjukta Wagh is a Kathak dancer and founder of an initiative Beej in Mumbai exploring dance process, pedagogy and performance.

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