

Duo has fun with dance

By [Lauren Gallagher](#)



Contemporary dance still has a long way to go in garnering mainstream popularity. But Los Angeles-based dance theater duo casebolt and smith — dancers Liz Casebolt and Joel Smith — may change that.

Already acclaimed on both coasts, casebolt and smith's "O(h)" — a witty, feisty and engaging full-length work about dance-making — makes its Bay Area debut at ODC Theater on Thursday night.

With entertaining, razor-sharp dialogue "O(h)" explains, exposes and dissects the choreography process with tongue-in-cheek humor. The piece ends with a 10-minute improvised song and dance that Casebolt and Smith create on the spot, making every show a little bit different.

The fact that "O(h)" has been widely performed on the fringe festival circuit and embraced by the theater community gives an idea of just how unconventional (and chatty) the work is — especially for the dance world.

"We're trying to reach a broader audience," says Smith. "We think of our work as having points of access so that more people can watch it and go, 'Wow, I want to see another dance concert.' We poke fun at the dance field while still relying on the clichés that modern dance choreographers use."

Casebolt and Smith talk to each other while moving, laying out the framework for the piece in front of the audience. They sing, dance, cuss, crack scatological jokes and make fun of "serious" dance choreography's conventional gestures and meanings.

Being a pair of dancers, their formation options are limited.

"Two people can't really make shapes," says Smith. "We have to walk a circle instead of standing in a circle. We reference famous works of choreography because we could never do Alvin Ailey's 'Revelations.' We don't have enough arms."

"We can't do Charles Weidman's 'Lynchtown' because two people can't be a mob," says Casebolt. Yet Casebolt and Smith put their duality to work, using those limitations to buck conventional gender roles.

"We can illuminate the gender constructions that have been placed on us and have discussions about them," says Smith. "Audiences have expectations of what they might see between a man and a woman, and we try not to give that to them. In thinking about gender, it's important to consider front-to-backness. I'm 6 inches taller than Liz, so if I'm in front of her, I'm blocking her. If she's in front then it's cliché. So being side by side ..."

"Is the most democratic spatial relationship," Casebolt says.

IF YOU GO

casebolt and smith

Where: ODC Theater, 3153 17th St., S.F.

When: 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday

Tickets: \$23 to \$28

Contact: (415) 863-9834, www.odcdance.org; www.caseboltandsmith.com