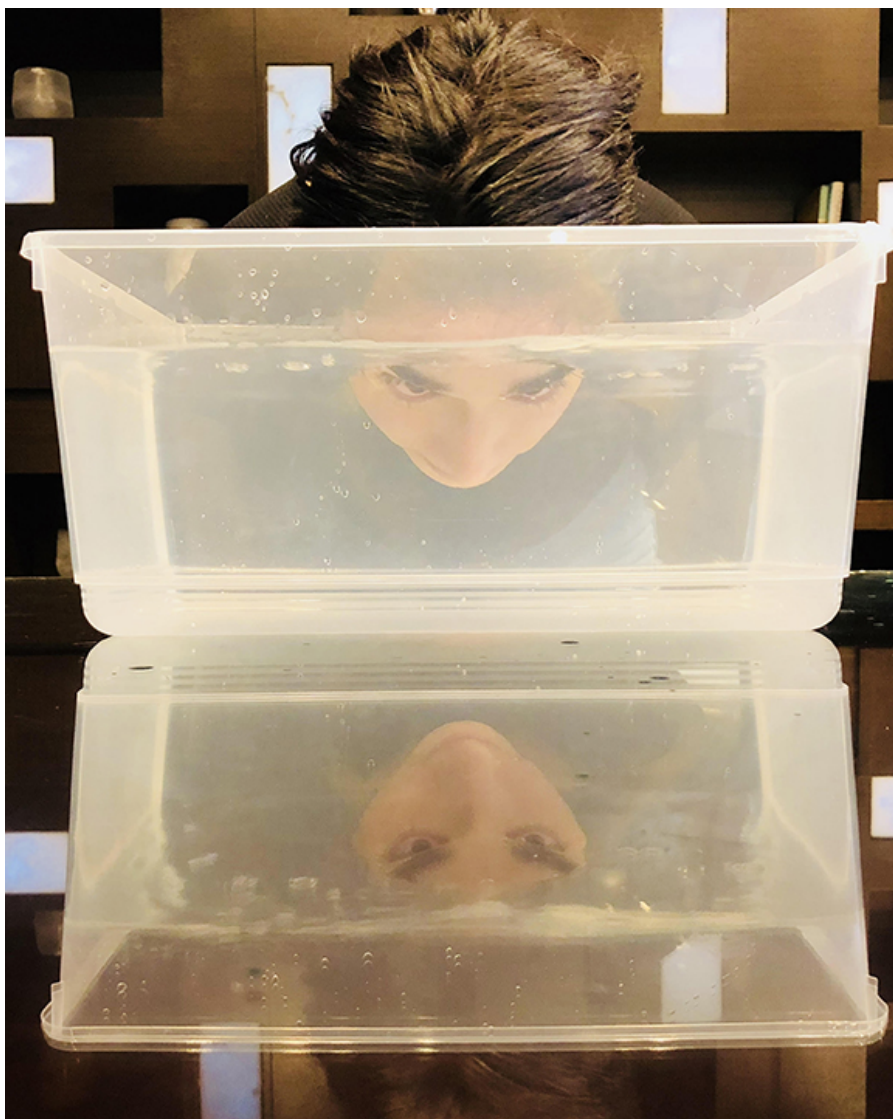


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SummerWorks 2018 Review: Swim Team



Swim Team

Director: Aida Keykhaii

Playwright: Jaber Ramezani

Cast: Banafsheh Taherian, Sara Saberi, Tina Bararian, and Pariya Tahsini

SummerWorks Festival

Franco Boni Theatre

July 12, 13 and 19, 2018

Reviewed by Ted Fox

Swim Team is a SummerWorks Lab presentation, as it is a work in development. It is a powerful metaphor for Iranian women's lives in the restrictive patriarchal society of post-revolutionary Iran.

Roya (Banafsheh Taherian) is a swimming coach who has moved to an apartment in an area where there is no water. She agrees to teach swimming to three young women: Lili (Parya Tahsini), Katy (Sarah Saberi) and Nari (Tina Bararian). All have aspirations to become champion swimmers. Only by using their imaginations can they achieve that goal.

When we first see them, they are wearing chadors-- large pieces of black cloth that wrap around their heads and upper bodies, leaving only their faces exposed. They have to wear these when outdoors.

They are attempting to move a sofa into the apartment that has a small doorway. The only furniture, at the back of the stage, is a table and four chairs.

Roya begins the training by having them submerge their heads in bowls of water on the tables, holding their breath and then coming up for air.

Stools are brought in. She creates a pool by extending ropes made of scarves around the living room carpet, running from one stool to another. One stool will serve as a diving board.

Using their imagination, these women become swimmers. They realistically simulate swimming movements from one side of the pool to the other, holding their breath, swimming, and coming up for air. So adept are they at physically simulating swimming I too actually see the water in the pool. They towel themselves when they come out.

There is a relaxed camaraderie and warmth between them. Normal everyday behaviour. One makes tea, and gets blankets for them as the room is cold.

One drowns. Her facial expressions, gasping for breath and going under are quite realistic. Roya is stunned by this, saying over and over that she does not understand, as the pool is not there, there is no water here, how could this have happened? There is a notice at the box office for this, saying "Warning: Simulated Drowning."

The others later wrap the chadors around their bodies and leave the apartment.

Well-acted and directed, Swim Team is a powerful evocation of how these women use the power of the imagination as a method of survival.

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