

## Big 3rd Episode: Happy/End

Ever wanted to know what *Sex and the City* would be like if it wasn't funny? Or what pornography would be like if it wasn't meant to be arousing? Or even what *Smells Like Teen Spirit* would sound like if its brittle, explosive brilliance were reduced to sludge by an inept pub band? Wonder no more; Franco-Austrian company Superamas have all the answers.

Big 3rd Episode: Happy/End really should be great. The wide stage houses a full rock band, an intriguing metal dancefloor and a gym changing room while a large screen hangs above it. The piece opens with members of a band breaking off rehearsals to drink beer as their married bassist reveals he's got their absent female vocalist pregnant. The action freezes and then the piece starts again. And again. And again. Sometimes the action moves a little bit further on, or is interrupted by more freezing mid-scene, but mostly it is increasingly grinding repetition.

The irritation is compounded by the fact that the performers are actually lip-synching to a poor-quality recording of the threadbare dialogue. Occasionally the sequence is interrupted by moderately diverting videos projected on the screen; twenty-somethings are shown making out in a surprisingly explicit video while the voiceover of an anthropologist arguing that humanity hates and fears love plays on.

The band and stage suddenly explode into life as the female lead singer screams through *Teen Spirit*, writhing around the floor in a tiny red dress aggressively exposing her breasts and pretty much showing everyone the contents of her knickers before collapsing into a heap of ecstatic masturbation. Then more videos, more sneering at modern life and more ironic distance. Three glamorous young women undress in the changing room of a gym while discussing their sex lives in desultory detail. The net effect is rather like seeing *Carrie*, *Samantha* and co. played by lap-dancers. This sequence also repeats over and over. The result feels as exploitative as it is dull. One of the women talks about getting cancer. Another appears to die in a car crash stolen from a David Lynch movie. Some Derrida happens on the video screen. And roll credits.

The real problem here is the corrosive cynicism at the heart of the piece, coupled with an approach to structuring that most closely resembles tearing pieces from magazines, books and scripts, throwing them up in the air and calling where they land a dramaturgical solution. While again, this sounds like it could yield interesting results, here it simply bores. The smug contempt, the straw targets and the sheer lack of intelligence or articulation of the objections make for tedious viewing.

Superamas clearly despise much of modern culture but at the same time display a horror of admitting as much, let alone suggesting any alternative. Their approach boils down to the spectacle of someone commenting on the objectification of women by putting a woman on stage and objectifying them. Thus run all their arguments with modern life. They take things they don't like, subtract the things that other people might well like about them, and then show us their joyless parodies to prove what a terrible place the world is. It is the sound of someone repeatedly banging their head against their own postmodernism. Happy/End is sex without passion, jokes without humour and life without hope. It's like capitalism without the shopping.