

# A masterpiece about love and oranges

By Camille LeFevre

Special to the Star Tribune

Hooray! They've done it again. Sossy Mechanics — the charismatic duo of Minneapolis performers Brian Sostek and Megan McClellan — has choreographed another miniature masterpiece of quicksilver timing, witty repartee, sassy dancing and physical comedy, "Pieces of Eight."

Just as in their earlier hit "Trick Boxing," here the duo constructs a multidimensional world, a cast of characters and a spectrum of emotion using their impressive acting and dancing skills and a few simple props.

The 80-minute work intertwines two narratives to create a play within a play. First Norman Goldwyn, a 1940s-era screenwriter, is reading aloud his script about a dancing pirate queen to the owners/brothers of the Sugar-puss orange grove and movie studio, with help from the studio bosses' secretary, Betty Grace Bootfree. Then there's the screenplay itself, a rollicking high-seas adventure with villains, a treasure hunt and a love story.

Sostek is a marvel as he instantly shifts—with a quick half turn, a flick of his wrist, a sudden hunch or a facial expression—from one character to another. He's the two studio bosses, switching from the bent-over mouth-twisted

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## Dance review

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### Pieces of Eight

**Who:** Sossy Mechanics.

**When:** 2 p.m. today, 8 p.m. Friday, 5 and 10 p.m. Saturday, 2 p.m. Nov. 7.

**Where:** Southern Theater, 1420 Washington Av. S., Minneapolis.

**Tickets:** \$20. 612-340-1725.

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brother to the looser, goofier one, as "they" explain the history of Sugar-puss oranges. He's the shy screenwriter and the lisping Gypsy captain of the pirate ship, The Fancy; the long-faced reclusive gardener and the gardener's Quasimodo servant; a French dandy and a nursemaid.

McClellan repeatedly kicks up her heels as Betty and her alter ego, Mad Maggie the Pirate Queen. For her, dance is the solution to every situation. She bares her teeth and slinks, swivels and seduces the French suitor in a swanky duet that's also a hilarious take on narcissistic self-absorption. She eludes imprisonment by letting a spicy tango — full dips, surges, spins and suggestion — decide whether the pirate captain or Spanish gardener has "captured her." And she's the mermaid who rescues the captain with a warm, lilting

duet of joyous partnering.

Each character is so clearly articulated through movement, expression and timing, it's almost easy to forget the stage is occupied by only two dynamic performers. There's a crate of oranges, watched over by the puppet Sammy Sugar-puss, of course. But the other props are cleverly multipurpose. Two umbrellas function as swords, ice-choppers, an anchor and the pirate ship's wheel. And Betty/Maggie's long aqua-blue scarf becomes a sail and a life-line.

Driving this well-crafted work are two puzzles that, when all the pieces are assembled, dovetail into treasure: love and oranges. Which means "Pieces of Eight" has a heart of gold that beats with the vitality of two performers whose cleverness and vitality just won't quit.

*Camille LeFevre is a St. Paul writer.*