



Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald

Melanie Jones stars in *Endure!*, a performance creation in which the audience runs along with her

# Performance on the run kicks into high gear

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The not-so-hot August Calgary night does not look promising.

There are big black clouds hovering just north of the collection of people gathered to watch, walk and run along to *Endure!*, a site-specific performance creation by Melanie Jones that takes place entirely along the Bow River bike path and RiverWalk, and in St. Patrick's Island.

It all has the look of a cold, wet, awful-feeling site tonight.

"If it doesn't rain too hard, we'll just keep going," says Graham, the production manager. "If it rains really hard, maybe we'll all duck

## REVIEW

*Endure!* at Eau Claire Market area. Created by Melanie Jones. Playing today Calgary, Sunday in Cochrane. Tickets and info: [www.runwomanshow.com](http://www.runwomanshow.com)

★★★★ out of five

under a tree."

Graham hands iPods to those of us who don't have one. He counts us down, and then we all hit play at the same exact moment.

Jones' voice, along with music by Swedish composer Christine Owman that is a little bit Tom Waits (in his oompah stage), PJ Harvey and maybe Kate Bush, stream into my ears.

And off we go, on what may be the first piece of performance art

that combines theatre, dance and a brisk audience cardio workout!

Welcome to the weirdly original world of *Endure!*, Jones' one-woman show that's an antidote to anyone who ever longed to push themselves a little harder.

The monologue by Jones is not unlike the voice in your head as you prepare to go for a run you don't really want to do.

It's the voice that has to talk back to the self-doubt, to the status quo inside our brains, to the conventional wisdom at cocktail parties, where she has to defend pursuing a dream that really makes no sense.

In Jones' case, that's to complete a 26.2-mile marathon, but really, the dream could be anything.

Past the joggers and cyclists we go, making our way east along the Bow River RiverWalk. There are old Asian men out at twilight, doing Tai Chi. On the RiverWalk, written in chalk, are little running mantras: You Can Do 42 (KM), and French Fries, French Fries, French Fries. Inside the park at St. Patrick's Island, we meet up with Jones (we've been listening to her voice without seeing her for the first 20 minutes), curled up on a park bench.

She rises, and leads us through her journey, against a backdrop of a gorgeous urban park on what has transformed itself into a lovely summer night.

*Endure!* might superficially be about running, but it also explores the self-doubts, social awkwardness and the emotional devastation of a youthful marriage gone wrong, which leaves Jones a mess of depression, anxiety and resentment that her life will never live up to her expectations.

Except she fights back against that voice by going for ever-longer runs, first an hour, then two, where she discovers how much she actually can endure.

Finally, the show leaves the park and reaches a crescendo at twilight in a field behind Fort Calgary.

It's the penultimate moment in the show — Jones as she breaks through that crescendo of pain and exhaustion that strikes her late in her theatrical marathon.

As she strives to finish, she runs laps around the assembled audience, going faster and faster, then farther and farther out, until finally, she simply disappears into the distant horizon, against a backdrop of the RiverWalk and the Bow River.

And almost on cue, a rainbow breaks out against the eastern horizon, a lovely payoff for the we night none of us has actually had to endure.

I guess some nights you just get lucky, huh?

Melanie Jones has created a show as beautiful as the unconventional setting it unfolds in.

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