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ISLAND LIFE

Posted on: Wednesday, April 16, 2008

Late Night Theatre overcome by art

Poetry, dance strangely moving as they take center stage

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By Joseph T. Rozmiarek
Special to The Advertiser

The Late Night Theatre series at the University of Hawai'i offers a provoking double bill that fills the 11 p.m. time slot with a couple of works that are more easily experienced than explained. Both are collaborative works for two voices or solo performance.



In the right frame of mind, their combined effect is strangely moving. Without proper preparation, however, you'd be justified in pronouncing it all wet.

The "art" portion of the evening is a linked poem by eight student poets, each using "art is what you can get away with" as its opening line. Contributors include Aiko Yamashiro, Ryan Oishi, Brandy Nalani McDougall, Julia Wieting, Kai Gaspar, Ann Inoshita, Kimo Armitage and Noel Norcross.

Andy Warhol is credited with the connecting refrain. Directed by Jason Ellinwood and performed by Katherine Aumer-Ryan and Jaevess Iha, the jagged verses have a pained and iconoclastic, retro beatnik coffee-house

vibe — even including, at one point, accompaniment on bongo drum.

Despite their return to their shared opening line for punctuation, the eight voices run together. None have anything directly to do with art, but all express a shared social or deeply felt personal experience. The most memorable is a meditation on a big-name discount retail chain, recently built on land containing Hawaiian burial remains.

Reaching back to the exploitive sandalwood trade, the piece credits brand-name bread and mayonnaise as the prescient awareness that named the Sandwich Islands. And after nods to T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," it ends with verses in Hawaiian.

Other voices speak to women's roles and what they would do, "If I were a man," and the pain of losing a grandfather who "lost his language" from a grandson who lost both his sexual and personal compass.

The second half of the performance is "overcome," a sequence of five dances choreographed by Abel Coelho, Gwen Arbaugh and Junko Mizumochi, directed by Coelho and performed by Arbaugh and Mizumochi on alternate nights.

The dances are a study in dark and light and go counter to the expectation that a dancer shapes the space in which she or he moves. In "overcome," space closes in on the dancer, compressing and restricting the individual to physical spasms that react or fight back.

Arbaugh performed on opening night and gave arresting emotion to even the more traditional dance

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UH-Manoa's Late Night Theatre series "art/overcome" performance at the Earle Ernst Lab Theatre features dance, poetry and discussion.

'ART/OVERCOME'

11 p.m. Friday and Saturday

Late Night Theatre

Earle Ernst Lab Theatre, University of Hawai'i-Manoa

\$8-\$10

956-7655, www.hawaii.edu/kennedy

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pieces.

"Kitten Face" is a somewhat literal interpretation of what the animal may be internalizing. In it, Arbaugh, never rising above her knees, licks paws and pounces on prey, but without cuteness or sentimentality. There is no fuzzy calendar charm in her kitten, which presents itself as an absorbed and dedicated predator.

But the most compelling sequences leave traditional dance far behind.

In one, a flashlight inside a red paper parasol provides the only illumination, with brief glimpses of the dancer's face and body to remind us that a person animates the images. In the final sequence, a mentor or emotional coach murmurs instructions as the dancer engages a bucket of water — first by inserting her toes and ultimately plunging in her entire head.

Joseph T. Rozmiarek has been reviewing theater performances in Hawai'i since 1973.

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