



HOME:ATLANTA

NEWS & VIEWS

MUSIC

FOOD & DRINK

FILM

ARTS

BLOGS & PODCASTS

BAD HABITS

LISTINGS

CLASSIFIEDS

Arts: Dance

# Modern times

Multimedia show has contemporary, critical edge

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upcoming repertory of multimedia performance emerges from a contemporary, critical world view.

The London-based Rajni Shah Theatre Group will debut the workshop collaborative piece, "The Most Unlikely People Confess to Their Dream," together with Juha, a performance group from the jungle town of Haiku, Hawaii, which makes its Southeastern premiere with "Orange."

The latter work documents the travels of two aliens as they take notes on planet Earth and its inhabitants. A postmodern version of the traveling medicine show, "Orange" combines funky, eclectic music and video imaging with offbeat character sketches. The resulting performance has a carnival atmosphere with a distinctly edgy, neo-space age appeal.

In "The Most Unlikely People Confess to Their Dream," five Atlanta performers have each created an individual vignette and set it upon one of their fellow troupe members. The five solos resulting from these collaborations incorporate non-traditional stage space, installation, writing, dance, original music and monologues. A sneak preview of the work was presented Friday at Paradigm Art Space.



enlarge

Chris Hansen

Topher Payne in "The Most Unlikely People Confess to Their Dream"

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In the opening sequence, Carrie Elzey, an installation artist and photographer, walks into the performance space carrying a suitcase and a picnic basket. The suitcase contains a portable stereo playing an original score. Elzey's character toasts an unseen guest, then hangs the tablecloth to form a makeshift canvas on which she crafts a silhouette of a house with masking tape.

The transition to Topher Payne's almost confrontational prayer is stark. Payne, an actor and writer, sits beneath a bright light, smiling up at it. He blinks. Arms crossed protectively in front, the smile is transformed to tears, perhaps of anger. His gaze breaks away then again seeks the light. "Tell me my spirit is beautiful," his character says. "Tell me I'm beautiful."

In the final portion of the preview work, Jill Sullivan, a modern and ballet dancer, backs into the performance space in a small blue convertible. "I swim in blue," her character says. She pushes the buttons on the radio, dances on the seats, the trunk, the entire automobile before stopping, disturbed. The effect works well, with the music creating the effect of changing moods for the character. "Hold him and keep him strong while I'm away from here," she says, then walks away barefooted, leaving the car behind.

Overall, the work is a bit uncertain, as though the performers are not yet comfortable in the skins of the characters they play. But then, the most unusual aspect of the work is the part the audience does not see -- the creative process. In this work, each performer has become intimately acquainted with another individual completely unlike himself and has taken on a role or medium with which he was previously unfamiliar. The work in this light, then, becomes an exercise in leaving behind one's comfort zone, trying on someone else's life and in a sense, making it your own.

So it stands to reason that this first debut into performance out of process seems tenuous at times, especially since the full-length work has yet to be unveiled. But what's not missing here is the earnestness of the work, the desire to say something worth saying, to risk a portion of the private self in a public world.

It's a risk few individuals are willing to take.

*Rajni Shah Theatre Group presents "The Most Unlikely People Confess to Their Dream" and Juha presents "Orange" in repertory at PushPush Theater, 1123 Zonolite Road, June 22-July 1. \$10. Thurs.-Sat. at 8 and 10 p.m., Sun. at 7 and 9 p.m. \$10. 404-892-7876.*