

Bits & Pieces

Review by
Deborah McGee

"I believe that the play reflects my personal bias that theatre art can be a healing art," says Terra Daugirda Pressler. She directs *Bits & Pieces*, current production of the University of Oregon's Second Season series. The play by Corinne Jacker attracts theatergoers of a more serious mind to Villard Hall's black-box Arena Theatre stage.

My first notes Friday evening: "Humans are eagerly curious about themselves; else why come to such a play?" I got the last two tickets; the overly warm theater was packed. The more upbeat vibrations of *Dance '87* in Robinson Theatre occasionally traveled to the ears of our audience. I reflected upon the potential for live theater to enlighten us, and squirmed a little for the more joyous method going on next door.

A doctoral candidate in theater, from Salem, Pressler chose a heavy play: it deals with the mortality of the human body, with a "dust-to-dust, ashes-to-ashes" philosophy. In *Bits & Pieces* a man named Philip dies, after donating his body parts to medicine. His wife, Iris, takes a journey to connect with those who received his body parts. Through dialogues with these people, and flashbacks to her days with the alive Phil, Iris comes to grip with the soul-searching questions stirred up by her husband's death. Philip's sister, Helen, appears non-linearly in the play as well, and she and Iris converse and relate on extreme approach/avoidance terms. Jacker has woven modern threads into the Egyptian pattern of the Isis/Osiris



Photograph by John P. Daugirda

Philip (Peter Davis) and Iris (Marla Wildeson) still communicate with each other although he has died. *Bits & Pieces* is produced by UO's Second Season Theater.

myth.

Director Pressler authored the play *FAT*, which was staged last October and earlier on campus. *FAT*, which I did not see, dealt with the issues of larger women; the play she directs here deals with the issues of grieving and emotionally dependent women. Pressler's recent work seems to explore the theater-as-therapy branch of drama. She approaches material which most people would avoid, for who wants to be reminded of our imperfections? For her

courage, she deserves praise, but the U of O's *Bits & Pieces* does not pretend to be a work of art.

Bits & Pieces is theater at its starkest end—the setting is as impersonal and severe as a minimal art exhibit. Few props are used and costumes are simple. It's a one-act play without intermission. Peter Davis plays Philip, Marla Wildeson is Iris, and Iris Peters portrays Helen.

It continues through Feb. 7. See the *What's Happening* calendar for details.

DANCE

Kiken Chin's *Between* is emotional, rich, rare

Review by Susan Brokaw

A young oriental man, apologetic about his English, dressed in tattered jeans and a T-shirt, sits on the edge of the stage and explains that the two dancers who were to be dancing with him tonight . . . and it's unclear if they disappointed him, he them, or he us. Anyway, he's dancing alone. In the ongoing dance saga *Between*, Kiken Chen remains alone. The child that was to be born (drawing on the metaphor of his last performance) was "aborted." Or was it a miscarriage? The former implies a choice made by the mother, the latter, a more ambiguous source of determination.

The set is dark. Bright white light marks off a diagonal portion of the otherwise blackened stage. The only prop is a small circle of shells on a string. The timid young man has been transformed. Dressed in a hospital gown fastened by one tie at the back and a pair of flesh-colored shorts, he has become a total dramatic presence who moves "excruciatingly" slowly into our view. Every fiber of his being is alive with tension, awareness, and control. Even his facial muscles are articulated so that he moves through emotions as he moves through space.

The audience at Soreng Theatre is so utterly still and absorbed that, when a child near me whispers, "What is he doing?"; it is heard throughout the auditorium. She speaks, perhaps, for all who watch, who are as focused as Kiken himself, on his movement. This is not the kind of performance that Eugene gets to witness very often. And one wonders from the mere handful of people who were there if Eugene is really able to support the high degree of artistic integrity that Kiken Chen brings to his performance.

Within five minutes, sweat is streaming down his bare back exposed under the hospital gown, glistening in the bright light. This

work portrays the minimum—and the maximum—of human experience. And one can see/feel/hear how tautly the two extremes are connected. As tautly as the tension that transfers into the soft gown he removes himself from, on his slow-motion journey to the shells which he drapes around his neck. The prop, the costume become an extension of the deep internal motivation that Kiken so openly invites his audience to witness. His breath, his pain, his joy, his personal struggle, his exquisitely articulated movement style are all offered up to the viewer without apology. And one must attribute to an internal source his uncanny ability to move through such a range of emotionality—aspersion, a decidedly feminine seductiveness, agony, pleading, silliness, languor, sensuality, release, obsequiousness, bravery, strength, joy—with infinitesimal changes in his posture.

Our sense of time becomes slowed down, so that by the end I wondered if he wasn't hurrying through the process. The piece builds in dramatic intensity, especially with the use of a few heart-rending songs. His agonized expression during the song *Over the Rainbow* is almost too much to let in. Such minimalist effects as the hollow sound of the shells clanking together as he moves, and the sight of the sweat-darkened floor he has just rolled over slowly drying, begin to open our senses to the richness of all human experience. The ending is powerful and ambiguous (perhaps due to technical error with the lights), so that we do not really know when the end happens. Is it his heart-rending scream as he sits once again on the stage edge, or is it when we find him sitting on the stairs with his daughter Kawa? By inviting us in to his ongoing saga, Kiken Chen leaves us with questions of our own to answer.

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dance
87

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