

Rev. Falwell, meet the S.F. Mime Troupe

By Sandy Johnstone
Of the Emerald

Factwino, a character from the San Francisco Mime Troupe's newest production, may not be able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, but he can take on the Moral Majority and Rev. Jerry Falwell at a gay bar, anytime.

Factwino is presented in the musical comedy "Factwino Meets the Moral Majority." Sedro F. Woolley is transformed from a wino into Factwino by the Spirit of Information, a bag lady, who gives him the power to make people think.

In a quest to endow people with thought, he ends up at an abortion clinic, a Moral Majority meeting and a Castro Street gay bar where he confronts Rev. Falwell.

"He confronts people, who are not thinking correctly, in the nick of time," says Melody James, who plays five roles in the drama. "But if he boozes it, he loses it." Armageddon man, who represents the military and business, is his arch enemy.

"We use comedy to make people think," says James. "The premise is that people are not using their brains. The play reaches a broad audience with concerns a lot of people have about rights that are being taken away."

Factwino basically questions the constraints that Congress may be placing on personal freedom and how that is tied to morality, James says.

"There has been a resurgence of Moral Majority ideas, a real swing to conservative (thought)," she continues. "There is an attempt to obliterate the victories of the 1960s and 1970s dealing with rights and choices."

"We use humorous comedy to talk about what's going on. People like to see their real lives portrayed. TV and movies are so ideal. You can aspire to that life but..." She shrugs. "The mime troupe looks at everyday people through archetypal

characters. They are big and broad but show the true situation."

Originally, the troupe performed silent mime, but in the early 1960s they "felt there was a lot to be vocal about. We use a very brash, vocal presence and a physical, broad mimetic style."

"We are not what you think of as mime," says James. "It is not silent and white-faced. It is more in the style of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton."

With each troupe member playing three to six characters in just over an hour, fast changes are essential. For example, James goes from playing "a drugged-out aggressive punk singer to a professional city woman" in three minutes or less.

James joined the mime troupe in 1968. "I was studying theatre and looking for one that addressed what was going on in the world," she says. "I liked the idea of taking theatre to people

who do not usually go to the theatre."

The troupe does not wait for crowds to show up in San Francisco. Besides touring the United States, they have made stops in Canada, Mexico, Germany, Italy, France and England.

Audiences around the world are "more sophisticated politically (than Americans). They are fascinated with the Americans and what they see as the nucleus of change. It is encouraging to them to see Americans that are talking about the things we (the troupe) talk about."

The troupe will perform in the Lane County Conference Center Theatre tonight and Saturday at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$5.25 in advance and \$6 at the door and are available at the EMU main desk, Everybody's Records, and Mother Kali's Books. The event is sponsored by the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides and the April 24 Coalition.



Photo courtesy of S.F. Mime Troupe

Factwino stands firm in his convictions and stature after a bag lady changes him from a wino to a superhero.



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