

His body seems to float and fly, soar, contort, fall, turn, twist, harden and loosen at the magical touch of his own mind.

Hayward Coleman, a world renowned mime-yoga artist, touched other minds when he performed at the University on May 16, through the efforts of the Black Student Union and University English professor Ed Coleman. Hayward's brother. The show was an amazing blend of mime, yoga, acrobatics, vaudeville — movement that Coleman calls physical comedy.

THE HOSTAGE

Bound, physically and mentally oppressed, jerked by outside forces with no control over his own physical body, Coleman expresses with intensity and power what it is like to be a hostage. He demonstrates, at the same time, practiced skill with total control over his body.

Coleman was inspired to do this particular act after performing in Beirut, Lebanon immediately before the outbreak of the civil war. His beginnings in mime-yoga run on the same thread.

He was studying economics at the University of California in Berkeley in the late 1960s. As part of his religious denomination, he was asked to give a presentation on what it means to suffer in contemporary America. He says he couldn't imagine how to explain this theme in words.

"We don't suffer like the people in Africa, or the people in Vietnam, or the people in Beirut are suffering," Coleman says. "It's a different type of mental and physical suffering."

So he did a skit called "The Loser," about a baseball pitcher who comes into the bottom of the 9th inning of the World Series and loses the ball

game by dropping a flyball.

"It displayed the agony of losing a very, very important event and the physical pain that goes along with it," he says.

After the presentation earned him positive response, Coleman was inspired to learn theater and mime. He worked with a local group and when he earned enough money, traveled to France to learn from the great mime-artist Marcel Marceau. For two years he worked intently with Marceau, then later worked with Marceau's master, Etienne Decroux. He has also studied with a Japanese mime, Mamako and Sol Cohen, a vaudeville comedy-acrobat.

THE FIRST SPOKEN WORD

Through metamorphosis, Coleman creates the evolution of man. He is a snake, he is a bird. He is a gorilla and finally he is a primitive human grunting the first word: "Hamburger."

The metamorphosis Coleman creates on stage is all part of his own metamorphosis.

His strongest transformation occurred when he was performing in Tunisia in 1974, and a Indian woman introduced him to the philosophy and techniques of Hatha Yoga. He then learned Hatha Yoga from spiritual teachers, and the postures and ideas of the yoga soon became a part of his act.

"I began to combine the two ideas," he says. "I used the philosophies of centers of consciousness (in Hatha yoga) and centers of non-verbal communication, which is what Decroux had taught."

He found that Hatha Yoga helped strengthen, balance and control his body. It also helped to prevent injury.

"My body is still supple and much stronger now than it has ever been in my life," he says. "I've found the fountain of youth, especially through the

breathing exercises."

The basic philosophy of Hatha Yoga — living a conscious and moderate lifestyle with discipline — became integrated into Coleman's own life.

He says he disciplines his body with the daily practice of yoga, meditation and acrobatics, but trains only three hours a day — moderate for a professional performer, he says.

THE ASTRONAUT

His body is levitated off the ground; he is floating above the earth. It seems as though his body defies gravity.

Coleman's ability to float is created by strong discipline, he says. He has found that he can leave behind his ego and become that being he portrays on stage. He calls it a transference of consciousness.

"Marceau says it is like Buddhism in which you first see the mountain and then you go to the mountain with your head and then with your chest and then with your pelvis," Coleman says, "and then you rise up to your toes and climb that mountain, and then you become that mountain, and then you come back, and you take on the quality of stability and solidness."

"Mime yoga is like that," he says. "You actually take on the qualities of a bird or you feel the warmth of a worm and what it is like to forage around and just be chomping on a leaf..."

He dives into the ocean in one skit. "I really feel like I'm swimming in the water because my body reacts to my imagination so much so that it feels real. So there's a body sensation as well as mental imagination going on."

The imagery he performs on stage is first seen in his mind through meditation. Coleman was initiated to Tibetan meditation in 1974. The type of meditation, creative imagination, is performed by Tibetan Buddhists who imagine the Buddha sitting before them in a lotus flower.

PERSONALITY AND POSTURE

A macho man on the beach, the Virginia Slim woman, the brain-only human; Coleman uses his body to express personality through posture and positioning.

Though all his material is original, he says at the same time it is all borrowed from vaudeville performers, other mimes and regular people.

Observing people is "my



Hayward Coleman

a master of mime

food," Coleman says. "My favorite pastime is to sit in a cafe in Paris and watch people pass by. Just how they hold their spines they communicate non-verbally; how they walk they say something about themselves. Oh, it's quite interesting for me. I love looking at people."

He says being a mime-yoga artist is a double-edged sword that he, in particular, has had a rough go at because he is the "first black mime" and had to break the ice, he says.

"People look at the stereotype of Marcel Marceau and I don't look anything like Marcel Marceau," he says.

"I thought I could make the kind of money Marcel could make just by being good at (mime)," he says. "But that's not true. I began to realize that there's only one Marcel Marceau, and he was the first

one, and it's his baby."

But Coleman has had numerous artistic successes. He performed with Diana Ross for two years on her world tour, solo in several countries including Egypt, at several national locations such as Caesar's Palace, and has appeared on French television and on American commercials for companies such as Burger King.

And though he believes he could've made more money with his economics degree, he is happy with his choice to stay in the arts.

"I don't regret that choice," he says. "To be an artist, to be a performer and to give my life to a type of art, which perhaps I could raise to a level of a religious art."

"So that way I'm greatly satisfied. I wouldn't be here now talking to you."

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