

Kesey play 'Twister' makes Oz stranger

By Lia Salciccia
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Leave it to the Merry Pranksters to turn Oz into an even weirder place.

With the help of a stage made out of a flatbed truck, some special effects, Huey Lewis, and quite a few random objects hanging from the ceiling, Ken Kesey, local writer and performance artist, transformed the Eugene Armory into a fantasy tripland representing Oz of years later than the one we visited with Dorothy so long ago. The result of the efforts of Key Z Productions was a theatrical extravaganza called *Twister*.

The Oz created at this invitation-only event wasn't like it used to be. Instead of trying to convince a spunkier Dorothy (Karen McCormick) to go kill a witch, the Wizard (Kesey), along with Oz regulars Glinda the Good Witch (Dawn Sewell) the Scarecrow (Phil Deitz) and the Tin Man (George Walker) urgently tried to convince Dorothy that Oz was in peril, because of AIDS, famine, ozone depletion, and a host of other societal ills.

Dorothy didn't seem to take the warnings that the world would end too seriously and joked her way through her journey, even when Toto showed up from the hurricane with a violin embedded in his back. But just when all of the political talk almost caused Dorothy to take the next shoe out of there, Elvis Presley (played by Lewis) took the stage with guitar in hand and melted Dorothy's heart with a rousing rendition of

"Shake, Rattle and Roll."

Sound problems obscured much of Kesey's witty dialogue, and more than one actor stumbled on lines, but like real show veterans, they covered themselves well. The image of the top-hatted Wizard and the pink tulle-clad Glinda were projected on a screen shaped like a cloud above and to the right of Dorothy, so as their eyes seemed to look down and left upon the girl, it wasn't entirely easy to tell that they really looked down at their scripts.

A forgotten line was an opportunity to enlist the audience for participation by singing, chanting or dancing. Frankenstein (played by Ken Babbs) growled fiercely at the crowd in lieu of a monologue and even started throwing folding chairs from the audience to the side of the room, so that the crowd took the cue to start putting them away.

In a single moment the show was stolen by the little angel Angelina Gloria (Emily Messmer), who flawlessly recited the longest monologue of the show, a sad story of how she had died in a shopping mall demolished by an earthquake.

Although the play centers on people uniting to conquer and depends upon crowd involvement, the audience looked like it didn't quite know its role in this spectacle. Perhaps they were fed too much television as youngsters, making them awkward to join rather than watch, especially when the growling Babbs started to throw chairs.

DEADHEADS

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asked.

Another trait of the Deadheads is, believe it or not, their capitalism. One guy tried to sell his last Coca-Cola for two dollars. There were crystals, necklaces made from bird skulls, bongo drums, clothes from Guatemala, magic wands, tofu-pate sandwiches, falafels, tarot readings and much more for sale in the not-so-covert "DeadMart."

But not all Deadheads are in it for the money — after all they have to make a living somehow in order to afford the gas, food and tickets that accompany their cross-country lifestyle. Most of them like to be there because they like the family atmosphere, even as the family grows to a number close to 60,000.

"This is my real family," said Spring, 16. "These are the most beautiful people in the world."

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