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STORY

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“So much for being normal,” said Hill-Meyer, launching into a personal monologue exploring race and gender identity.

This monologue was part of “My Own Story,” a performance held in the EMU Ballroom showcasing the work of students of color who participated in a five-week workshop led by Alex Luu, a Los Angeles-based performance artist. University students who participated in the workshop explored their most poignant life experiences — particularly regarding race and ethnicity, gender identity, family dynamics and earliest memories — and developed them into autobiographical monologues.

Four students — Toby Hill-Meyer, Maria Cortez, Erica Tucker and Tiffany Skinner — performed their monologues for a packed crowd.

“I’m very big on oral histories,” said Luu, 36, who has led the MOS workshop at the University since 2001. “The things that make a great story are opposite extremes: The most wonderful thing you’ve done, an experience that you could celebrate; and something really horrible that brought out a lot of deep emotions.”

The first MOS workshop held at the University was specifically for Asian students. But in 2002, Luu opened up the workshop to all students of color.

“People of color don’t see our experiences and stories reflected on a daily basis,” Luu said. “You wonder, ‘Does my population even matter?’ That’s why I do this work — because your stories matter.”

Cortez focused on her experience as a light-skinned Mexican-American who grew up poor. Initially she was hesitant to make her story public, but she felt more confident once she worked out her script.

“It helped me to solidify parts of my identity,” Cortez said. “It made me dig down into my past. There are a lot of things that you suppress.”

Identity is a theme Luu encouraged workshop participants to explore.

“I think it’s important to be able



Erik R. Bishoff Photographer

Writer and actor Toby Hill-Meyer performs in the EMU Ballroom on Thursday night. Hill-Meyer’s performance addressed the dualities of living as neither a man nor a woman and being neither black nor white.

to identify in some way,” he said. “People don’t do a lot of thinking in my workshop. It’s more about reactions. It’s the rawness that I want people to see.”

The process of self-exploration resulted in the students’ unflinchingly honest monologues. Audience members gave a standing ovation at the end of the show.

“I think that a lot of the performers had things to say that related to me,” sophomore Fahima Mohammed said. “That really inspired me to do it next year. I’d like to break some stereotypes.”

All performers identified with more than one race, challenging the idea that they should fit neatly into one ethnic category. But Hill-Meyer, a women’s and gender studies major, also questioned the practice of fitting into a single gender category. Hill-Meyer has requested for the purposes of this article that the Emerald refer to Hill-Meyer using the gender-neutral pronouns “ze” for “he” and “hir” for “him.”

“I’ve had stories that I needed to

tell for awhile,” ze said. “When it comes down to it, the pronouns that people use for me is not the point. I don’t feel that any gendered pronoun is appropriate for me. I’m trying to get the recognition that people see a more complex person.”

The performance made an impression on pre-journalism sophomore Nancy Saechae.

“I identified with a lot of what people said up there, but I think it was even more important to talk about the things that were don’t identify with, like Toby’s story,” she said. “I’m not transgender, but an environment like the UO is not so receptive to people who are different.”

Hill-Meyer’s mothers, sitting in the front row, were riveted by their child’s performance. And as it turns out, ze did become a senator. Hill-Meyer was elected to the ASUO Senate for 2004-05.

“We’re proud of him,” Jennifer Meyer said. “It was really brave.”

Kera Abraham is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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