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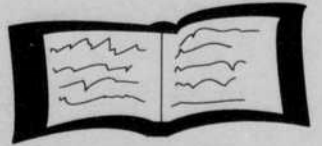


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Kafkaesque



*The production leaves
Kafka's stories of alienation
for personal interpretation*

BY JOSH LINTEREUR
PULSE REPORTER

The 20th century brought to us by Franz Kafka was one filled with the anxiety and alienation the Czech writer saw in an increasingly indecipherable world. Though the writer's core thematic content has become synonymous with the term "Kafkaesque," his writing stands as some of literature's most abstruse works by eluding definitive interpretation.

Staying true to the enigmatic nature of the influential author's work was the underlying approach to the University Theatre's "Kafka Parables," an original production derived from more than 30 of Kafka's short stories and diary excerpts.

"We don't want people walking away thinking there's only one way to imagine these stories," director John Schmor said. "We'd be limiting our audience's ability to follow the story imaginatively."

Opening Friday, the show is the collaborative effort of students and faculty who began meeting at the beginning of winter term to assemble a selection of the author's writings around visual images, music and movement.

Under the guidance of choreographer Walter Kennedy, an assistant professor of dance at the University, the production emphasizes bodies, space and the collective presence of the actors on stage, an aesthetic more often found in dance.

"You don't want to classify it," Kennedy said of the show, which avoids the recognizable devices of a play. "We've had to deal with things in a very different way than you would with an existing script."

Instead, the show weaves together a series of Kafka's stories, with sparse dialogue taken nearly verbatim from his texts. Kennedy choreographed scenes that bookend each of



LAUREN WIMER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

From left: Sergio Martinez, Teresa Koberstein, Katie McEntee, Kyle Warren and Alexander Dupre star in the University Theatre original production of "Kafka Parables."

the show's two acts.

Though Kafka's short stories provide the backbone of the production, Schmor said calling the show a series of vignettes would be misleading.

"It's a series of overlapping images and texts that begin to tell a larger story," he said. "The first act is really about life in a city, and in particular, modern alienation in a city. In the second act you see what happens to that city: A kind of police state emerges, people are being arrested for no reason, you can't find lawyers, a lot of people are in prison, and the next thing that happens is war."

Though Kafka's writings were about anxiety and alienation after the turn of the 19th century, those themes can carry even greater weight with contemporary audiences.

"If anything, postmodern urban life is even more alienating," Schmor said. "Back in Kafka's day, people still took walks. There weren't cell phones, e-mails and all of these other distancing devices."

Despite these overt themes, "Kafka Parables" remains constructed in the tradition of German playwright Bertolt Brecht, whose techniques challenged audiences to experience theater in a different way.

"Brecht's aesthetic is that you don't give audiences full-blown allusions because then they stop

thinking," Schmor said. "It's like the way children can immediately and imaginatively fill in the gaps by the sparsest kind of performance. And they interact with the performance more imaginatively."

As a devised work hinging on the collective efforts of the cast and production crew, audiences will only get one chance to experience this original production.

"It has never been seen and it will never be seen again," Schmor said.

The University Theatre's production of "Kafka Parables" will be performed at the Robinson Theatre on May 13-14, 19-22, and 27-28. From May 19-22, audience members can donate to the fund assisting the rehabilitation efforts of former University student Noah Smith, who was severely injured in a car accident more than two years ago and is making progress toward walking again.

Tickets are \$5 for University students, \$12 for general admission, \$9 for senior citizens, University faculty and non-University students, and \$7 for youth. Tickets are available at the EMU and at the University Theatre Box Office in the Robinson Theatre on the night of the performances. Free parking is available in the University lot at the corner of East 11th Avenue and Kincaid Street.

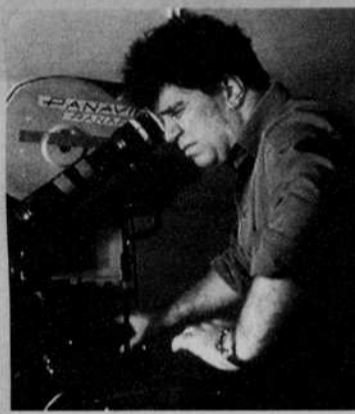
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