

Theater explores history of cruelty



(Courtesy photo)

“LAMB,” a multidisciplinary piece by Pangs Theater Ensemble, attempts to deal with mass destruction.

Christina Troup, The Examiner
Aug 9, 2007 3:00 AM (6 hrs ago)

SAN FRANCISCO -

In the multidisciplinary performance piece “LAMB,” Wolfgang Thompson, artistic director of Pangs Theater Ensemble, is on a mission to illustrate that all too often history does indeed repeat itself.

Through a combination of ballet, theater and avant-garde performance art, Thompson utilizes the lyrical poetry of Paul Celan and the warnings from prophet Jeremiah’s “Book of Lamentations” to explore the legacy of human suffering and cruelty that has taken place throughout history. Pangs Theater Ensemble performs the piece tonight at the Humanities Building in San Francisco.

Thompson’s piece was inspired in large part by his realization that mass destruction, in particular the conflict in Darfur, continues to be a reality. While reading the “Book of Lamentations” and Celan’s poetry, the director says he found a direct correlation to such events as the Holocaust and the Darfur crisis that he felt compelled to create a work that created a dialogue to question why society has yet to learn from the past.

“My awareness that genocide is still here — that we have not learned — hit me hard,” he says. “It’s easy to isolate ourselves and not accept what is going on, but mass destruction is still happening today. It’s not something that’s easy to deal with, but something has to be done. Even if it’s on the smallest scale, it’s important to recognize the situation and bring awareness to it.”

Despite the heavy nature of “LAMB,” Thompson says that the “symphonic performance of lament” isn’t solely focused on the doom and gloom of historical events.

The three central characters — two sirens and the prophet Jeremiah — explore a range of human emotions that ultimately gives rise to an inspiring message of hope for a peaceful world.

“There’s this perception that the piece is too heavy, but it’s really not. I believe in entertainment and want to be entertained,” says the self-taught artist and director. “People will be able to stomach the harshness of the piece and not be overwhelmed by it because it will be counterbalanced by these beautiful physical movements.”

Thompson’s goal with “LAMB” isn’t necessarily to single out any one historical event, but rather to promote the idea that the world should first and foremost be a better place. The first step, he says, to creating such a world is to encourage people to be better to one another.

“At some point in our daily lives, even if it’s the littlest thing, we have to make a point to do more,” Thompson says. “Whether it’s reading to the elderly or donating food to a homeless shelter, we have to be honest with ourselves about we can do and actually do it. It’s a hard world, but also a beautiful

world and we need to do our part to make it a better one.”

LAMB

Presented by Pangs Theater Ensemble

When: 7:30 p.m. today

Where: Humanities Building, 1185 Vicente St., San Francisco

Tickets: \$10 to \$30

Contact: (415) 515-0851, www.pangstheater.com

Examiner