

Filling an empty space for Waterloo

JUDE DOBLE - *SPECIAL TO IMPRINT*

When there is a call for an audition, an actor typically tries out for a part in an existing play. Not the case with MT Space, KW's newest theatre company.

Each project starts with a theme and it is the actors and director who work together, over several weeks, to develop the concept, the script, and the movements for the production. Every player is charged with the responsibility of making the performance an engaging experience for both the cast and the audience.

For artistic director Majdi Bou-Matar, the KW arts community had an "empty space" that he felt could be filled by developing a multicultural theatre (MT) group, where diverse professional performers could collaboratively develop ideas. To build the foundation for this non-traditional theatre company, Bou-Matar needed a group of young people to commit weeks of their lives to develop this performance piece together.



COURTESY OF JUDE DOBLE
Yoga positions are one of the many things you'll see during *Nijinsky Through a Window*.

The first theatrical experience for MT Space, *Nijinsky Through a Window*, was showcased on August 28 at the Theatre of the Arts. A cast of five, made up of one UW student and several recent UW grads, donned the bare stage to explore the turbulent life of legendary Russian ballet dancer, Vaslav Nijinsky, one of this century's greatest ballet dancers. The performance was a glimpse into the life of a talented man which was marred by jealousy, loss and schizophrenia.

The cast, with help from UW drama Prof. Andrew Houston and local dramaturge, Jasminka Klacar, spent the summer creating a challenging performance. It was shy on dialogue and big on interpretive movement.

Systems design engineering grad Phil Wang, who played the title role of Nijinsky, said the actors worked in character "to create and discover emotions, relationships, conflict — anything as long as it was intensely enthralling." There were no right or wrong ideas that could be suggested, but whatever the group didn't agree on was dismissed.

For Nicholas Cumming, another UW grad, this was an exciting element. "The entire cast contributed to the actions, movements and structures of the scenes...at no time were our roles singularly our own," said Cummings.

Bou-Matar said the cast chose themes that "reflect[ed] upon our personal concerns and anxieties, questions dealing with love, hate, gender identities, religion, war, power and fame." The result was an unusual and interesting blend of languorous and frenetic movements dispersed between brief yet intense emotional monologues.

"The language of movement is universal and crosses cultures," said Bou-Matar, adding it does so in a way that is not limited by language. In this way, the actors with Asian, Eastern European and Middle Eastern backgrounds conveyed a message that went beyond the content of words, expressing human misery and angst, through movement and sound.

The presentation of Nijinsky's ballet company, *Ballets Rousses*, was fun and sassy. Lively French jazz music played as a single hand, foot or bum appeared from behind several backdrops. The farcical and coy scene added some levity to the heavy themes explored. The theatrical acrobatics and physically entwined bodies were akin to an evening of *Cirque du Soleil* meets *Kids in the Hall*.

The cast of *Nijinsky Through a Window* entertained, moved, surprised and at times wowed the audience by the level of physical determination demonstrated. UW grad Julia Turzanski's exhaustive dance as a harlequin charmed and amused. As MT Space's first attempt at collaborative performance creation was a success, future projects will be worth checking out.

Nijinsky Through a Window is beginning its next phase of development, where the full-fledged production will premiere in the Festival du Monde Arabe in Montreal this November. MT Space is looking forward to working with more artists from diverse cultural backgrounds for this and future productions. The curious can inquire further at themtspace@hotmail.com.