

Intersection for the Arts gazes into "The Future Project"

Karen D'Souza, *San Jose Mercury News*

Out of the rubble of the past comes an esoteric meditation on things to come known as "The Future Project."

The ever-adventurous Campo Santo troupe and the Erika Chong Shuch Performance Project join forces for a dreamlike fantasia on apocalyptic themes that merges dance, text and music. An magnetic pas de deux starring Sean San Jose and Shuch, this non-linear riff flips back and forth between realities so nimbly it's easy to lose the thread.

Still, if this tapestry of sights and sounds doesn't quite hang together, the cumulative effect of this genre-bending theatrical collage is quite striking. Subtitled "Sunday will Come," this is a contemplation of mortality in uncertain times. Directed by Sharif Abu Hamdeh, it captures the paralysis and whimsy of post-modern life in an elliptical 60-minute piece that alternately touches and mystifies.

Stitched together by a number of notable writers including Philip Kan Gotanda, Octavio Solis and Daniel Alarcon, the narrative slips around like fish in a bowl. That's no accident. A pair of goldfish figure prominently in this play as do the couple that owns them.

The estimable San Jose, one of the finest actors in the Bay Area, and the lithe Shuch (a noted dancer/choreographer) mesmerize as the fish, their bodies entangled in a wordless ballet of sighs and gestures. They fling their limbs about the stage with an eerie fluidity that's heightened by Denizen Kane's hypnotic vocals.

Meanwhile, back on dry land, the couple (also San Jose and Shuch) circles around the topic of euthanasia in a wry game of "he said, she said." One of their pet fishies is dying and they can't decide what to name it, whether to put it to sleep or how the dirty deed ought to be done. Death by freezer and death by automobile are among the options considered.

This ode on the death of goldfish is just one strand in a mosaic of vignettes that's as quirky as it is abstract. There's a sad tale of a grandmother's deathbed interlude. There's also a sermon about the end of days that seems to be a commentary on the decline of the environment. Certainly, the set evokes a barren urban wasteland of darkness, shards and debris. The mesmerizing songs also suggest a sense of emptiness and loss, an elegy for a world falling apart.

How all that fits with a vaudevillian bit about a dancer (Shuch) milking a death scene for every last drop of bathos remains ambiguous. Indeed, there are so many levels to this hybrid project that watching the play is a little like trying to solve a Rubik's cube where the colors keep changing on you. Just when you think you've figured out what the narrative means, the motifs shift beyond your grasp.

It complicates matters that "The Future Project" is prefaced by a 10-minute sneak preview of a haunting new work ("Lost City Radio") that gets the mind off on the wrong story-telling track. In theater, unlike in dance, it's hard to flow from one realm to another without losing the drift.

But perhaps that's the central theme of this project. At some point, it becomes clear that the intellectual is just one tiny piece in this elusive kinetic puzzle. Shuch's mutable choreography is far more rooted in the truth of the body than that of the mind. In her world, metaphors dance. Subtext does a little jig. It may be better to simply sit back and let the stream-of-consciousness tableaux wash over you. Like the fishes, perhaps we too must go with the flow.