

"Dance 'til your dead." - Yeah Yeah Yeahs

A 'VISION' IN RED

By Jared Alokozai

What language and semantics cannot express, perhaps a body in rhythmic motion can. At the Irvine Barclay Theatre this past weekend, the Claire Trevor School of the Arts tapped into the boundless body eloquence of dance in their 16th annual student showcase, Dance Visions.

Six vignettes — or visions — comprised the show, each with their own thematic emotion proudly demonstrating the eclectic range of the dance program. From the precision of classical ballet conventions to the writhing abstractions of modern, this ambitious spread aimed to satisfy the palates of as many art patrons as possible.

A nod to UCI Dance's strong ballet-focused program, the first vision — choreographed by virtuoso Professor of Dance Tong Wang — was a rendition excerpt from the romantic ballet, "Giselle". Beginning during what would be Act II of the full concert, this excerpt explores the Wilis, phantasmic forest spirits, who resurrect the peasant girl Giselle.

As an apéritif, this pagan, folkloric classic was a crowd favorite. Haunting lighting and costuming, combined with well-placed ether fog and masterful handling of the score by the UCI Symphony Orchestra, transformed the stage into a vision world, perfectly showcasing the concert's wide range.

Embodying the vengeful specter of Myrta, the spirit queen, soloist Sky Schmidt elicited audible gasps and swoons with her capable athleticism and graceful adagios which propelled her weightlessly among the ghostly ensemble.

The next piece, "United We Stand, Divided", choreographed by



JUMPING FOR JOY In "House of Tears", celebrated choreographer Donald McKayle presents an evocative piece that tells the violent and heartbreaking story of the Argentine Dirty War through the eyes of "the Disappeareds".

COURTESY OF ROSE EICHENBAUM

Shaun Boyle, thrusting the show into the 21st century. Angled lighting evoked shadowplay, with the small cast of six multiplying as they projected shadow doubles onto the wall. A trance drone drum and bass score revealed Boyle's London influence. Sporadic timing and disjointed synchronicity — the dancers writhing on the floor, then tumbling into a leggy pose or into staccato arm ticking — successfully delivered moody inquietude.

The next two routines continued this dive into modern choreography. Legendary professor emeritus Donald McKayle choreographed "Bittersweet Farewell", a moving lamentation of legato fluency

articulating arm-in-arm with the unexpected score. Heavy symphonic metal from Finnish and American metal cellists, Apocalyptica and Break of Reality, structured the routine's grief with the powerful resonance of metal.

Following this, Charlotte Griffin's "The Only Sound against this Stillness" was perhaps the most esoteric dance of the night. Erudite and experimental, the score was an operatic, hymnal reading of excerpts of Jim Harrison's free verse landscape poetry, read by Robin Buck and accompanied by Alan Terricciano on the baby grand. Perhaps this piece sought to evoke a conversation between the multi-medias, but didn't seem to stick.

Though Buck's baritone is indeed powerful and full, it just did not complement Jim Harrison's matter-of-fact wordplay; it overpowered it and dissolved all meaning from it. Terricciano adeptly handled tricky time signatures, but the dissonance of his non-melodies, distracted from Buck's full timbre. The dancer's abstract shaping and athleticism wasn't in conversation with this distracting score, but instead seemed to happen without it. If anything, this piece showed what sometimes happens when a university tries to play with and between different conservatories.

After that head-scratcher of a piece, guest artist Millicent Johnnie's "Algoda Reggae" blew

a much-needed seafoam breeze into the theater. A medley of wave sound samples and modern reggae music inspired this piece. Set in the remote paradisiac Brazilian fishing island of Algodal, known for its rich reggae scene, the dancers, costumed in casual rasta-esque beachwear, perform in pairs. Lively samba steps get elongated into a dreamy reggae beat, with hip isolations and sensuality. Though refreshing, this piece echoed the same lack of chemistry from the previous one, some couples unconvinced in their execution.

Luckily, the show finished strong. "House of Tears," from Donald McKayle, dealt with the Argentine Dirty War of the 70s and 80s, a period wherein state-sanctioned death squads systematically killed thousands of Argentine communist guerillas, a mass of dead known collectively as "the Disappeareds". Strong political overtones and a cinematic score from Astor Piazzola, with the talents of

principal soloist student dancers, created an overture that was compelling, engaging and visceral.

Emma Walsh, Carl Cubera and Kristy Dai performed beautifully, with depth and charisma. Especially unnerving, putting this finale over the top, was the set design, which had massive portraits of victims gazing right at the audience.

The wide range of genre is sure to appeal to almost everyone, but the pacing and confusingly academic explorations privilege only the learned few. All in all, despite questionable artistry, Dance Visions is undoubtedly a staple in the Dance department, a professional showcase of Anteatr talent.

The Alien World of 'WetWare'

By Michelle Turken

Behind the non-descript double doors of the Beall Center for Art and Technology lives an alien world, one in which artificial life reigns supreme. As I entered the interdisciplinary exhibition "Wetware: Art, Agency, Animation", I was confronted with eerily lit sculptures, a pile of discarded tech and whirring robots that looked like they'd been plucked from your wildest sci-fi fantasies.

Highly futuristic and interactive, the exhibit featured art embodying the convergent technologies of today. Blurring the distinctions between living organisms and machines, artists employed informatics and synthetic biology to stage "aliveness", prompting us to ask ourselves the cliché yet altogether important philosophical question — what is life?

The agency of experimental systems, non-human organisms and robots are illustrated through a series of displays ranging from "Engineered Antibody", a beaded necklace which painstakingly represents amino acids folded in the precise structure of an antibody to "The Great Work of the Metal Lover", a biotechnological apparatus containing extremophile

bacteria that generate real gold.

Here, gold production is achieved by introducing these specialized bacteria into an engineered atmosphere, enclosed within a tailored alchemical bioreactor. Crafted by Adam Brown in collaboration with Kazem Kashefi, "The Great Work of the Metal Lover" includes an exhibition of the alchemical bioreactor along with a series of microscope photographs showcasing gold deposits generated by the bacteria.

In a different context, these images could be interpreted as abstractions of flowers or clouds, with their delicate strokes of white interspersed with flecks of gold, rather than as bacterial secretions.

Other exhibits included "BioSoNot", a contraption which allows viewers to detect the electrical oscillations of bacteria as they purify tainted water, and "Parasites", an installation consisting of robotic forms which develop to suit urban settings.

"Moscas (Flies)", made out of discarded cell phone vibrators, and "Pepenadores (Gleaners)", built of recycled toy motors, digest mankind's technological waste, moving and making sounds to claim their respective roles within the metropolitan

landscape. Climbing over piles of antiquated tech on their spindly legs, "Pepenadores" appear more like living spiders than artificial machines.

"Luminiferous Drift", designed by Evelina Domnitch and Dmitry Gelfand, was an exciting performance piece that reveals the fluctuations of phytoplankton in the biosphere of an imaginary planet. Clustered in a dark room, viewers stood transfixed as Gelfand released an emulsion of fabricated protocells into a rotating concoction of aqueous solutions. As soon as the cellular solution met its counterpart, the basin fluoresced bright blue as the jet stream was imbued with biosynthesized light.

After the performance, Gelfand, a filmmaker by training, discussed his interest in the project, stating that he wished to "explore light in its full dimensionality." The undertaking began when photographs of bioluminescent plankton were captured by the international space station. One of the earliest life forms, plankton are responsible for much of the chemistry that sustains our fragile ecosystems, exhibiting a complex feedback system interpreted by some as a form of intelligence.

Believing that phytoplankton may formulate the origin of extraterrestrial beings, Gelfand was inspired to simulate the actions of these organisms on a revolving celestial body, devoid of life.

An innovative and thought provoking collection of interactive exhibits, "Wetware: Art, Agency,

Animation" introduces visitors to the complexity of 'artificial life.' Whether you are an engineer, scientist, artist or sci-fi fan, this exhibit is a must-see. Admission is free and open to the public. The exhibit is open until May 7, 2016 and gallery hours are Thursday through Saturday, from 12 p.m. to 6 p.m.



COURTESY OF MICHELLE TURKEN

OUT OF THIS WORLD "The Great Work of the Metal Lover", a piece created by Adam Brown and Kazem Kashefi, showcases the intricate visual structures of gold deposits via bacterial production.