



Daily Magazine

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'Word Becomes Flesh' is a nuanced contemplation

By Lisa Kraus
For The Inquirer

Marc Bamuthi Joseph belongs to the rare breed of artist who can kindle political and cultural awareness while delivering a highly entertaining performance. He's an ace raconteur, a rap poet, and a rousing dancer of tap, hip-hop, and jazzy modern.

In *Word Becomes Flesh*, Joseph's story of impending unplanned fatherhood is the lens through which he reflects on his own history as a black man of Haitian descent, on slices of African-American history, and on the world that awaits his unborn son.

With guitars and percussion for backup, Joseph is at his most powerful when language and movement erupt together in rapid-fire bursts. He delivers a revelatory exposition of how traditional African dancing morphed into the singularly American form that is tap. He skulks along the floor in a scene worthy of the darkest Greek tragedy, playing the role of his own "worst enemy." His dramatizations and impersonations are pitch perfect.

A nuanced contemplation of freedom, responsibility and choice, *Word Becomes Flesh* leaves the audience members to draw their own conclusions. Would that more artists aiming to highlight cultural injustice and moral quandaries had Joseph's articulate gifts.

\$25. 7 tonight at the Painted Bride Art Center, 230 Vine St.

Wish Card. Dance Advance invited Romanian choreographer Cosmin Manolescu to create a performance piece with a diverse bunch of local colleagues. The resulting *Wish Card* is a partially improvised performance, with everyone in the space simultaneously, that lacks polish but offers some raw gems.

Melisa Putz stretches her lithe body into clear arcing shapes in her duet with Manolescu, melding contact improvisation with a more muscular sensibility. Ju-Yeon Ryu ignites in a jumping solo with hair streaming. And Eric Schoefer's repeating solo phrase is silken and beautifully articulated, with a nod to the martial arts.

It is Manolescu in his performing style who meets risk most fearlessly head-on. In one sequence, artifacts of his life as a Romanian visiting the United States are taped to his body. In another, he uses spoken words to punctuate a series of gestures that include powerfully slapping his chest.

For each of these moments there are many less focused ones. Clear strategies for composing images in which each member of the group had meaningful part seemed the hardest to formulate. Maybe more knowledge of work in this realm, beginning with that of improvisation groups like the Grand Union in the 1970s, would have aided them.

- L.K.

\$15. 9:30 tonight at the Painted Bride Art Center, 230 Vine St.

Shakesploitation. Being at the top of the literary heap for four centuries has subjected the works of Shakespeare to countless parodies. His plays have survived them all, even ones more lame and witless than this.

Actually, the three pieces of *Shakesploitation*, which Iron Age Theatre and Norristown's Centre Theatre are presenting, are double parodies, combining takeoffs on Shakespeare plays with burlesques of movie genres. Thus, we have *Othello* done as a blaxploitation movie, a *Romeo-and-Juliet*-inspired zombie flick, and a kung fu *Hamlet*.

Although I didn't find much to laugh at in any of the pieces, I did admire the dedication of the people from Chicago's New Millennium Theatre Company, where the play was developed, to make *Shakesploitation* as silly as possible, and I commend the able performers for their energy and enthusiasm. They seem to really enjoy being a part of this theatrical foolishness - and if Thursday night's sold-out show is any indication, it seems that some theatergoers like seeing it just as much.

- Douglas J. Keating

\$15. 8:30 and 10:30 tonight at Journey Home Community Enrichment Center, 948 N. Eighth St.

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