

Welcome back, Synergic Theater

Light, movement and sound filled Reynolds Theater over the weekend as Synergic Theater marked its Durham homecoming with a major performance.

A Review

The group takes its name from the word synergy, meaning a system where the sum is greater than its parts. So what they present is more than dance. It's theater combined with music — and other sounds — and light, including a multitude of images.

The opening piece was my least favorite. Guest soloist Richard Haisma

staged and performed "Letter III of the Maximus Poems" by Black Mountain poet Charles Olson.

Haisma's oratory skills were evident, yet left me unmoved. I didn't find the piece accessible perhaps because I wanted to see movement, rather than an exercise in dramatic interpretation.

On a lighter note, humor and delight were displayed in "The Fool," an animated parable, written and directed by company director David Manning. It told the story of the fool who left paradise to find himself. "Who am I?" he asked all he encountered. He climbed a

mountain, believing that once he reached its top, he could find an answer.

A voluminous brown parachute was the mountain. As the fool reached its heights, the dancer was replaced with a doll. The fool finally reached the top but was little enlightened.

Painted umbrellas portrayed the fool's eyes and pairs of shoes "walked" across the stage, propelled by invisible strings. After the accustomed scarcity of props at the American Dance Festival, it was a welcome change to see Synergic Theater's fun-loving use of them in this piece and others.

Haisma soloed again in his 1982 work "Terra Incognita Belief Map." It was billed as "the romance of Edison in packages of time." Dressed in a black jumpsuit, Haisma moved about the stage, a light bulb — flashing on and off — balanced in the palm of his hand. His execution was precise yet fluid; his movements punctuated the air.

"Discarnate Landscape" reflected the subtle, timeless qualities of the San Francisco Bay area. With a canvas before him, a painter explained his desire to portray opposites, as exemplified by the ocean. It intrigued him, he said, with its push and pull, and its up and down movements.

Then the performers painted a living picture, as the artist, portrayed by Durham sculptor Klaus Hoog, looked on. Suzanne White Manning, artistic director sang Haiku lyrics

and sailboats made of scarf-like material cruised the bay. Instrumental music created and performed by Gary Evoniuk completed the piece.

The audience seemed captivated by the subtlety of "Private Lives." Marjorie Scheer, suitcase in hand, entered a room. Was she returning home or about to leave? Anne Deloria and Bryce Wagner joined her, as the audience tried to figure out their relationships. A fourth person, Jack Arnold, joined their interaction.

Glances, the angle of a chin or a stance said more than any words could. Music by George Gershwin played throughout the 1976 work, which premiered in Duke's Page Auditorium.

Overall, Synergic Theater presented a very good program, well balanced

and accessible. Each piece was a good length and I left feeling satisfied.

Any performance by the Synergic Theater is a sizeable undertaking. Their needs are, literally, quite large, given their props and technical equipment. The company made good use of Duke University's Reynolds Theater, which provided the wide, open spaces and technical sophistication they needed for their three performances over the weekend.

Synergic Theater premiered in Durham at the 1974 US/USSR Summer Arts Festival. Their weekend performance marked their first major one since returning here last year after working four years in San Francisco. They've made Durham their permanent home base for teaching and creating new works. Welcome back!

— ALLISON ADAMS