

CSU offers three times the mystery

BY TAYLOR D. IVERSEN •

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Those who walk into the University Center for the Arts' Studio Theatre this weekend will be treated to an hour of paranoid monologues, spooky revelations and plot twists befitting an M. Night Shyamalan movie.

"Three Short Plays/Three Short Shocks" is the brainchild of director and CSU theater professor Eric Prince. As the title infers, each of the plays is short - averaging about 12 to 15 minutes - and each delivers a dramatic shock at the end that will spin audiences' heads.

"The thing is each has something experimental, disturbing, something not normal," Prince said. "You'd never see them on television or in a normal theater. One of the great things about college theater is that we get to take risks."

Prince is certainly taking risks with his production, which features two plays written by the notorious Irish playwright Samuel Beckett, whose plays are known for their mystique and penchant for the bizarre. "Three Short Plays" will begin with the last play Beckett ever wrote, "What Where," followed by "Not I," a play Prince would argue is Beckett's most infamous.

"In Britain, some people have broken down while attempting to perform this play," he said. "It's an experimental piece. It's less than 20 minutes, and it's quite unforgettable. It's very short but it's one of the most difficult roles for a woman to perform. It's just a mouth visible on the stage, giving a really terribly frightened monologue."

Wendy Ishii, CSU Master Teacher of Acting and one of the founders of Fort Collins-based Bas Bleu Theatre, stars as the mouth in "Not I."

"It's a terrifying role to play," Ishii said. "All it is is a mouth about six feet above the stage, everything is in darkness and she just vomits out words for about 15 minutes. It's actually a beautiful play; the more I work on it the more I just love it."

"God only knows what the mouth is talking about,"

she said. "I don't particularly try to analyze Beckett's plays. I don't really think too much about what they are about. I have really powerful images in my brain, and I have a sort of story for this woman. I think if people could be inside my brain while I'm doing this and see these pictures, they would be absolutely horrified, but everyone will have their own (take). All I can do is feel it, say it and concentrate; everyone will come to their own conclusions."

The final play of the evening, "Sisters," was written by Prince specifically for the show and focuses on a pair of young twins playing in their bedroom.

"It had been a long time since I wrote anything - a few years, I think," Prince said. "I started thinking back to my childhood and I remembered my mother had two sisters that were twins and they used to baby-sit me as a boy. I kind of thought about their relationship as twins and then about my own two daughters when they were little and all the crazy games and noises that came from their bedroom. I put this recollection into this little play."

CSU sophomore Sophia Guerrero-Murphy, an 18-year-old theater and political science major, portrays Charlie, one of the sisters in the play.

"I'm somewhere between a 9- and 11-year-old girl; the slightly older twin by minutes," Guerrero-Murphy said, adding that the actors spend much of the show playing around and jumping on beds but every now and then it switches to an eerie tone. "The sense of reality in the play isn't as strong as you think it is in the beginning," she said.

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"We go from the playfulness of the two girls into a dreamlike visitation," Prince said. "We're never quite certain of the identity of that person, and one of the girls has a revelation, a secret she shares with her sister and that profoundly affects the way the audience experiences the play."

Prince said mystery fans will thoroughly enjoy the evening. With the promise of a shock in each play, one can only sit in suspense, wondering what kinds of shocks Prince has in store.

"It's not like when you put your finger into an outlet," Prince said. "It's not that kind of shock, but there's a sense that if an event happens or you see something and it profoundly affects your thoughts, your feelings. There's a shock to your own system of knowing and your feelings of perception. Shock can be this sort of transformation in you. You have an understanding that you never had before.

"Every play has this quality to it. There's something in each of them that might disturb you. I thought it would be neat to have all the shock value. It's not horror shock; it's a gentle inner change kind of shock."



John Erickson plays Bam in Samuel Beckett's 'What Where' performed in a CSU production called 'Three Short Plays/Three Short Shocks.' (Dawn Madura / The Coloradoan)

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'Three Short Plays/Three Short Shocks'

When: 8 p.m. today through Saturday
Where: University Center for the Arts, Studio Theatre, 1400 Remington St., Fort Collins
Cost: \$18 general admission; \$9 for CSU students
Information: (970) 491-2787 or www.

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