

MTQ

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Cherub Productions Sets Mood At Towson

Cherub Productions capped a week of workshops conducted for the Towson State University's movement theatre department with performances of *THE WELL HUNG MAN* and *THE HUNG UP LADY*. In April, Christopher Eaves and Theresa Francomacaro returned to their alma mater to perform their critically acclaimed works for Baltimore audiences. The movement theatre performances on the stage at the TSU Campus were just one part of the evening's experience.

Good theatre creates mood; it surrounds its audience with atmosphere. The creative performer, playwright, or director draws from many techniques to produce entertaining and thought-provoking pieces—on stage. These two young talents drew on an age-old technique and included another dimension in their production—the house. They went beyond the proscenium to create an atmosphere in the house that enveloped the audience from the moment they entered the theatre. The small theatre was dressed in high camp cabaret style. The cabaret setting replaced traditional seating and created the illusion of intimacy. Each small, round table had two chairs and was set with colorful table dressing. Candles on the tables and low light coming from . . . somewhere . . . replaced the normal house lights. The dingy lighting suggested the mood to be set by the stage lights when the curtain rose on each piece. The atmosphere gave an indefinable edge to the evening. The mood was not quite dark, not quite decadent. A dark, gaudy veneer. A faux-faced emcee. The message was clear—"Tonight you will be entertained and you will leave feeling slightly uneasy."

The hostess for the evening's entertainment was Nonami Flowers (John Flowers), a popular Baltimore drag queen. Cheap, trashy, raucously bawdy, Nonami drew the audience into this fantasy cabaret and, from there, into the performances. *THE WELL HUNG MAN*, conceived and performed by Mr. Eaves, was the mixed media portrait of a voyeur. Hanging from a rope by one leg throughout the piece, Mr. Eaves painted a portrait of a sociopath's madness and sexual repression brought on by childhood trauma. The character, obviously educated and outwardly social, hinted of Baltimore's blue-collar roots.

After the intermission, Nonami opened the second act with a campy, trashy lip-sync that returned the audience to the fantasy cabaret and into the performance of *THE HUNG UP LADY*, conceived and performed by Ms. Francomacaro. Her bondage-like presentation, on stage, of a woman in the throes of a decaying relationship seemed to draw a subtle parallel with the confined setting of the cabaret's tables. A space that at first seemed so intimate became cloying and restrictive further emphasizing how a relationship can become—seemingly intimate in the beginning, ultimately suffocating as it decays.

At the final blackout, the momentary silence reflected the uneasiness that ran through the audience. Even the applause at the curtain call seemed tinged with it. The messages contained in these pieces were emotionally powerful, enhanced by the mood set in the house at the beginning of the evening. The atmosphere lingered even as the house lights came up and the fantasy closed.

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