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Entertainment: Theater

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Interactive 'Spoonful of Hope' deals with aftermath of 9-11

By: PATRICIA MORRIS BUCKLEY - For the North County Times

Many artists have grappled with the subject of 9-11 and how that tragic day changed Americans. Palomar College professor Michael Mufson and his theater students are now offering their creative response with "Spoonful of Hope," an original theatrical performance/installation.

"This piece is in the same vein as others we've done, such as 'Wireless City' and 'Undefining Queer,'" said Mufson. "We're calling it 'theater in the surround.'"

The audience will enter the performance space and the drama will surround them. There is audience interaction, but in a non-threatening way, he promised. For instance, each audience member is handed a small white bag on entering and they're asked to write their hopes on the outside. These bags are later used in the play.

"It will be like a medieval festival," he said. "It starts as a landscape of our society before 9-11. The audience walks around and sees the different exhibitions."

In the exhibitions, audience members meet the different characters. There's an aspiring middle-class family, a seeker, an apathetic activist, an Islamic woman, a guy who is poverty, and two characters simply called Hope and Greed. The latter is the antagonist.

"Then 9-11 hits and they go through a phase where they wonder how they can articulate hope after something like that," he said. "And our hopes turn to hopes of revenge and violence. Eventually the absence of Hope allows Greed to move people into their division."

In the second half, the characters learn to discover community, compassion and moderation. They also learn to turn off the TV, which Greed is using to manipulate them.

"The play is about rediscovering community through human interaction," he said. "And that's what theater is all about as well."

Mufson developed the show with the students and that led to interesting discussions about community and division. One of the theatrical devices he uses in the show is fence walls between the characters that roll to different positions throughout the show.

By the end, the characters see that the division prevents them from experiencing community.



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"This play is really about finding hope in America," he said. "It asks what are the obstacles to overcoming division? How can we see our fellow citizens as fellow human beings, not enemies? It sounds complex, but it really isn't."

"Spoonful of Hope"

When: Previews, 4 p.m. May 10-11; regular performances, 9 p.m. May 13-14

Where: Performance Lab, Room D-10, Palomar College, 1140 W. Mission Road, San Marcos

Tickets: Suggested donation of \$8/Pay what you can

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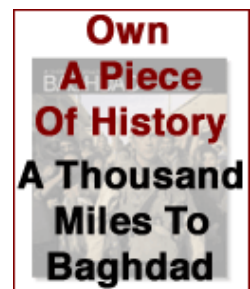
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