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"House of the Living Tarot" features IONA dancers playing major characters of the Tarot in a Nuuanu house. Danielle Paschal is The Empress.

House of cards

"The Living Tarot" offers up a special journey of dance

By Gary C.W. Chun /
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'The Living Tarot'

Presented by IONA
Contemporary Dance Theatre

On stage: 8 p.m. Thursday through Sunday, and Aug. 9 and 10

Place: The house at 2627 Pali Highway

Donation: \$30

Call: 550-8457 or visit
honoluluboxoffice.com

Parking: At Nuuanu Congregational Church, 2651 Pali Highway

Screw in screws in devil ceiling." "Glue mirrors on magician purple trim." "Paint & glitter stars." A list of projects for volunteer workers was posted early last week just inside the front door of an unoccupied two-story house on the windward-bound side of the Pali Highway. For this weekend, the century-old abode will be "magically" transformed into a house of living tarot cards.

Major arcana figures like The Fool, The Devil, The High Priestess, The Magician and The Lovers will be interpreted by the members of Cheryl Flaharty's IONA Contemporary Dance Theatre.

They'll be "using everything except the back yard -- in case it rains," Flaharty said. Most of the house's 15 specially decorated rooms will be occupied by a

dancer who will perform and interact with a constantly rotating audience. (But first, each person in the audience gets a personal tour of the house, planned out for them by volunteer readers shuffling the tarot cards.) And unless a patron is so inspired by "The Living Tarot" to buy this old house afterward, it's scheduled for demolition.

That impending sense of impermanence appeals to Flaharty's artistic sensibilities. This particular event is part of the company's annual Salon Series performance, all set in unusual spaces. "We're always in unique locations, whether it's an art gallery, the top floor of a Waikiki business building, or on public beaches.

"We've never done anything in a house before," Flaharty said. "With this space, we're able to do a lot more. It's like doing a whole installation." The owner of the house, Mike Irish of Hahn's Kim Chee, is donating use of the space for the fund-raising performance.

WITH A living room, dining room, kitchen, porch, a small sideroom downstairs and six bedrooms upstairs, Flaharty said half-jokingly that the termite-ridden house is being held together by newly applied Spackle. "But I did have a structural engineer make sure we could do aerial work, and hold hands in a circle in The World's bamboo-and-collage-strewn room.



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Chandra K. Miars is The High Priestess.



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Darren Miller is The Fool, who serves as tour guide to visitors.



"This time around, I think the costumes are a minor part of this piece. It's really about this space, this house and how it's being done up for the tarot. And since the house is supposed to be torn down afterwards, it's a work that probably won't exist again."

In order to accommodate an audience of close to 200 nightly, each simultaneously performed piece is scheduled to last about five minutes. Volunteer docents and a maitre-d'-like Fool will keep things moving.

"The Tarot is about the journey of the self," Flaharty said. "The psychic who reads your dealt cards is all yours."

The audience can expect to spin The Wheel of Fortune; see The Devil, and his wings made of heavy chain, playfully toss red balls in The Sun's brightly colored room; watch The Lovers intertwine in an aerial display;

They will also be fed pastries in the kitchen by The High Priestess, who, in a specially written piece by Victoria Kneubuhl, "will deliver spiritual lessons based on feminine principles."

The dancers' work has been largely improvisational, Flaharty said, "and I've been blown away by their talents. For them, it's interesting to note that this work has had more of a personal impact on their own lives. The dancers get to make each room their own by helping decorate.

"This is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. We do performing arts that exist in the moment. There's such beauty in it, very transcendent, very Buddhist."



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