

Salon Series opener full of delight

August 29, 2004

Performances allow audience members to join the fun

BY CAROL EGAN
Special to The Advertiser

IONA Contemporary Dance Theatre launches its interactive Salon Series this weekend with "La Madonna" at Studio 1.

The intimacy of the venue is perfectly suited to this dance/theater happening created by IONA's artistic director and choreographer, Cheryl Flaharty.

Part gallery walk-through, part dance/mime performance, "La Madonna" offers plenty of sensual stimulation. It also invites members of the audience to join in the fun in numerous ways.

To enter the gallery, you must proceed down Nu'uano Street and pass through a small garden giving a sense of stepping into a secret den. Once inside, you can choose one of two spacious rooms to enter. In total there are 11 stations (definitely not of the cross) on which a specific goddess image or mystical event is portrayed. Two installations include additional male characters.

Choosing the room to the left, your first encounter is the delightful Madonna of the Sacred Fruit, Maile Baran.

Standing on a large white mat ornately decorated with fruit, she wields a mean-looking kitchen knife,



IONA Contemporary Dance Theatre's Maile Baran is the Madonna of the Sacred Fruit, part of an interactive performance at Studio 1.

which she initially uses to lovingly carve a watermelon. Once finished, she begins to tease and tempt her onlookers with offers of her delicacies.

Another equally tempting and involving character is Pandora Out of the Box, the very sultry Geneva Rivera, seducing her audience.

Meanwhile, Sami L.A. Akuna as Hieros Gamos, clad in a dazzling red satin suit, with black patent leather boots and black top hat, approaches then retreats at times inviting a viewer closer, at other offering someone a bouquet of lilies.

Gaia Unearthed features a trio, including Laura Brucia Hamm on a throne, with two

black-suited male angels kneeling before her.

With its cluster of pearly white balloons spilling from her feet to the ground below, it also becomes interactive as the performance develops, offering onlookers souvenir balloons.

Several of the performers hold you spellbound merely through their hypnotic gaze: Sequoia Carr-Brown as Nut, the Egyptian Sky Goddess, magically star-spangled under black light; Danielle Paschal as Kuan Yi Goes to Hollywood; and Jamie Nakama as White Tara, silver painted from head to

'LA MADONNA'

IONA Contemporary Dance Theatre

7 tonight, final performance

Studio 1, 1 N King St

\$16

528-0506

foot. Others do so through movement.

Wailana Simcock and Andrea Torres do aerial floor movements on and off a suspended ladder in The Ascension, creating a living, ever-changing mobile.

The gentler images of The Magdalene, a very pregnant Summer Partlon, enthroned on a table top and Sophia, the wind-blown Lizbeth Grote, resembling a Botticelli painting contrast starkly with Chandra Miars' Primadonna, who dips herself in a vat of milk and flirts with the four men who sit at each side of her Oreo cookie-lined mat.

For intensity of performance and superior control of ever-so-slow-motion actions, IONA's performers cannot be beat.

No detail of production has been overlooked. Every costume, prop, makeup and setting is meticulously executed.

For the full effect, try to arrive early to see the performers as they launch into motion.

REVIEW

SUNDAY August 29, 2004

By Liza Simon

Special to the Star-Bulletin

Last night at Studio One, real men who don't eat quiche were amongst the expected metrosexuals lapping chocolate coating off of strawberries fed straight from the graceful hands of Madonna of the Sacred Fruit.

And it didn't matter if you were from Mars or Venus or any constellation betwixt the two, you'd still be struggling for your planetary bearings if Pandora Out of the Box summoned you with red apples, red bras and, oh yes, weren't those baby bottle nipples on her fingers? And why did you oblige her by slithering along atop the art deco dresser that must qualify as the ultimate box a la Pandora?

Oh, the things we do for art!

Well, not usually. But exceptions to the rule were meant to be savored last night as the Iona Contemporary Dance Company debuted *Madonna*, a series of improvised tableaux about goddesses.

It is the kind of stuff Iona has staked its well-deserved rarefied rep on all these years, and it was also decidedly more effective because of the interactive format chose for this show.

All week, plenty of advance publicity gave tips about Iona's new interactive production. So the big guy in the HPU basketball shirt who slowly edged in on the title goddess couldn't pretend for too long that he was only checking to see if that was ... ahh ... like his Ginzu knife she deployed to slice the melons as well the air in front of his nose. He was there to be part of it.

Interactive meant all of us highly mixed up demos had a big more ... well ... responsibility to – as Brother Iz used to say – know how for' act – or, in this case, interact. Because Iona dancers train physically and spiritually, they execute moves intended to move you inside and out.

To be in their eyebeams is to give in to this extraordinary sensibility. This means you have power to fuel the interaction, to make the art happen, even if it is in front of a room full of strangers and you've never seen or done anything like this before.

So then even for guys who don't eat quiche or the rest of us who don't normally swallow daily discourse on Butoh aesthetics (the Japanese theatrical art mastered by Iona), *Madonna* is very filling fare.



Danielle Paschal portrays Kwan Yin in the new show by Iona Dance Company.

'LA MADONNA: RECLAIMING THE GODDESS'

Presented by IONA Contemporary Dance Theatre

Where: Studio 1 Art Gallery, 1 N. King St.

When: 7 p.m. tonight

Tickets: \$16, available at the Hawaii Theatre box office or at www.hawaiitheatre.com

Call: 528-0506

But part of the fun of *Madonna* is definitely in being part of an audience that is collaboratively climbing a learning curve even as the performers perform. For *Madonna* not only has no stage, it has no plot.

You mill around between the goddess tableaux and wait to be taken in by one that seizes your soul. If the show's theme were monsters, you'd be several times fried by the eyebeams of Godzilla. But let's not give the highly iconoclastic Iona Dance Director Cheryl Flaharty more wild ideas. She obviously has a compendium of them up her choreographer's sleeve already.

In fact, despite the hype around *Madonna*, Flaharty's company long ago interacted with audiences in a way intended to break down

barriers that perhaps had more to do with real life than imaginative art: Over the years, she has held several Dance Company workshops in women's prisons. She and her dancers are also regular visitors to hospital wards for geriatric patients. In her performances in the public schools, students in special –ed classes are unabashed in their enthusiastic reception for her work.

Over and over, Flaharty has expressed and interested in reaching out to audiences.

This means she and her dancers are looking for you. You can't run and hide forever from the fun they want to bring to your evening.

Check them out. Interact! You might never want to sit in a darkened theater again, but that's the price you pay for being in presence the goddess.