

Mugwumpin's Strange Occurrences

WHEN YOUR VERY FIRST PRODUCTION WINS BEST OF Fringe and Best New Play, you might be tempted to just keep doing what you're doing. Not so with Mugwumpin, the San Francisco-based performance company whose 2004 *Rabbit Causes Dog* swept the San Francisco Fringe Festival.

After six years of acclaimed productions—including *super:anti:reluctant*, which made it all the way to the Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre—the company is not only re-creating itself, but reinventing the very model of a theatre season.

"We're imagining the year as a single performative piece, with a single theme," says Christopher W. White, artistic director of Mugwumpin. "All of our smaller, modular performances, what we call 'Occurrences,' are connected to that theme. And then we'll have what we call our Marquee Show, which will actually take place in a theatre."

Most of these performances are conceived for non-theatre spaces. The idea is to challenge the relationship between performer and audience, reshape the boundaries of theatrical space and, as associate artistic director Liz Lisle says, "bring a bit of magic into the world."

For 2010, the theme is *Possessions*. "Each Occurrence is somehow related to that theme," Lisle says, "but in very different ways."


The primary meaning, of course, is things people own. But there's also a sense, White says, "of who's being owned. Who's

actually in control? Are we being possessed by our possessions?"

The first Occurrence, titled *I Have This _____ [Possessional Confessional]* took place in an urban alley during March's Oakland Art Murmur. "It was a sort of bizarre confessional booth," White says, "where we invited people to speak to performers and be interviewed about their belongings, in a context that was very visually engaging, almost sculptural, with moments that would sort of explode out of the confessional booth."

The second, *Get This Go*, was a one-night-only event that took place in three motel rooms and asked the question: In a disastrous situation that forced you to flee your home with only what you could carry, whether because of a volcano, an oil spill, a civil war, a hurricane or a flood, what would you take with you and what would you leave behind?

"Each of the pieces can stand by themselves," White says. "But our hope is that throughout the course of the year the audience begins to draw their own connections between the pieces. Maybe have a sense of *déjà vu*: 'Oh, I remember I thought about *this* last time I saw a Mugwumpin piece in relation to this overarching theme,' so that when they see the final Marquee show, there's a sense of all these different ideas getting knitted together."

This year's culminating theatrical piece, *This Is All I Need*, looks at possessions from all sorts of angles, from the ways that belongings turn into memories to the razor-thin boundary between being a collector and being a hoarder. Created by the ensemble and codirected by Lisle and Jonathan Spector, it's the end of a year-long theme—and the beginning of a new way to think of a theatrical season. 

This Is All I Need runs from August 6 to September 4 at Noh Space, 2840 Mariposa Street in San Francisco. Visit mugwumpin.org for information.

Tim Bauer is a playwright; learn more at timbauer.wordpress.com.

Christopher W. White and Madeline H.D. Brown in *This Is All I Need*. Photo: Dafna Kory

