

OCT. 20-26, 1994

Icons Revisited

Produced by Lisa Sturz and Melissa Sagerian for the Los Angeles Puppet Artists Collective, in association with L.A. Theatre Artists, at the Complex (East Theatre), 6468 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood; (213) 466-1767. Opened Oct. 13; plays Thurs.-Sun., 8; closes Nov. 6.

This swift, entertaining evening of vignettes performed by members of the Los Angeles Puppet Artists Collective is most appealing for its varied display of puppet construction. Some are realistic, others are completely abstract. Some are operated by the ol' hand up the sock; others by more complex systems of levers and poles. One puppet is a mere little feather. Another is a huge god figure. Still others are made up of inventive combinations of household utensils and some cleverly mix in the bodies of the puppeteers. All can be magically lifelike.

The visual array is fascinating, enough so that we recommend the show (though not for kids) despite having to note that the animation of these puppets is merely ordinary, if not frequently clumsy. There is more tangling, backstage shuffling and sightline disruptions than one expects from this troupe whose coordinator is Lisa Sturz and whose unrefined technical direction and lighting design is by Amy Halpern.

Sturz, however, earns high praise for her conceptual and construction talents, notably on "Facing Both Ways," which comprises Act Two of *Icons Revisited* and is a multiform enactment of ancient Celtic themes.

In it are puppets of all sorts and sizes—co-constructed by Rob Secret—as well as live actors Kristin Charney, Laura Levy, Don Lewis, Amy McKenna, Graeme McKenna and Melissa Sagerian. Shadow performers are Heather Barr and Kevin Hammond. Nicely stirring them all up is evocative music composed by Michael Eagan, plus traditional tunes played as lovely harp solos by Dinah LeHoven and Rod Basler. Costuming is by Nazhat Hester. Choreography is by Carol Guidry. The script is by Andrew Campbell who also partnered Eagan and Sturz on the lyrics.

Some highlights amid the handful of first-act sketches bear mention: A temblor tosses about all manner of household debris and forms them into delightfully inventive creations in Jeff Karsner's "Closetquake!" Thom Fountain is a hoot inhabiting the body of bawdy old "Miss Potts" and Michael Earl is both a pleasing troubadour and solid practitioner of the evening's most accessible puppetry, performing his "3 Works."

The least effective sketch is Christine Papalexis' "Amaterasu" which endeavors to be a moody Japanese fable but is insufficiently interesting for the time and effort it takes to unfold.

So, yes, one can endorse *Icons Revisited*. But there are strings attached.

—Richard Scaffidi



A scene from 'Facing Both Ways' segment of 'Icons Revisited'