

# Women

Healing is goal of artists' performances

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therefore nondominant point of view — from the vantage point of "the other." Their language springs from myths and archetypes newly unearthed by a reborn women's consciousness. Their writing is exuberant with that sense of discovery, and their vatic utterances are almost always shot through with humor.

As artists performing and thinking on the cultural edge, they humanize the subjects dealt with theoretically by academic feminists, including the hundreds of scholars gathered for the ninth National Graduate Women's Studies Conference, "Thinking on the Edge," ending today at UCSD.

This year's conference, like those in the past, featured performance — by solo writer-performers Kathy Acker, an iconoclast from the art world, and Yareli Arizmeni, head of the theater program at Cal State San Marcos.

An earlier conference presented the first play by Cheryl L. West; her much-praised "Jar the Floor," now in a vivid production at the Old Globe, potently explores the virus of female self-hatred triggered by incest and passed on through the generations.

But unlike the playwright who hands her script over to a director for interpretation, the performing writers create and package their own images, communicate from the base of their female identities, perform with power and authority, and therefore become examples of what their work is about.

Their work subverts the age-old

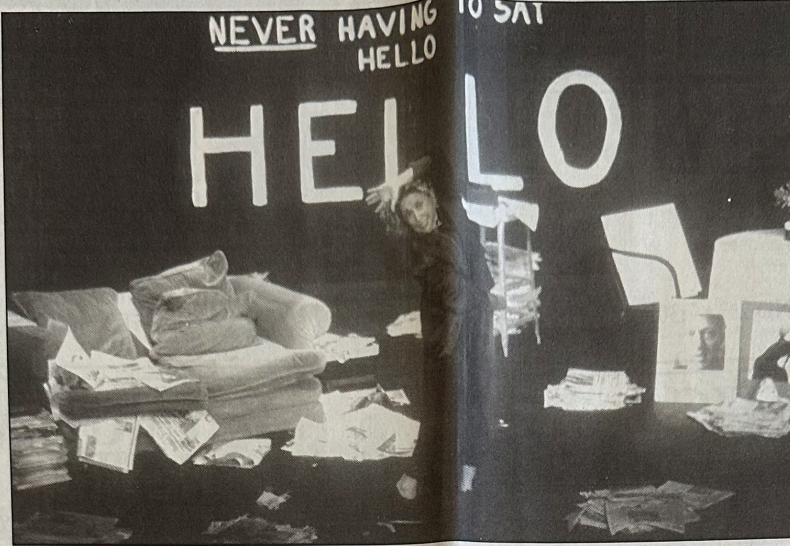


Photo / MARK HISS

entitlements of white, middle-class heterosexual males (and their female accomplices) as ideal audience, as producer, as publisher and arbiter of taste.

Dancers from Isadora Duncan through Martha Graham to Twyla Tharp had already broken through to achieve artistic autonomy and control of their stage work; and women in comedy could at least look back to pioneer Ruth Draper and trailblazer Lily Tomlin for a tradition. But this newer kind of writer-performer could only have happened after the feminist movement of the 1970s.

Not to worry, Sigmund. They

don't want to substitute a new female hegemony for the old male one. With a varied 20-year-old tradition of feminist writing and performance from which to draw, there's nothing monolithic about their work.

## Social rituals

The exchange of energies — audience to performer and back again — at these performances can accumulate great heat and power, for the oracular style is a return to pre-theatrical forms of communication, back to story and poetry as social ritual, not formalist

artifacts.

The exhilarating reading by Harjo, Shange and Waldman on the Cross Fertilizations Series curated by UCSD poet Quincy Troupe for the San Diego Museum of Art had the intense, visceral

performer-audience connection of a good rock concert. For many in the packed house, it amounted to a kind of ritual cleansing.

Yet those three poets are very different in approach, form, technique and style, despite their shared pull toward performance and the many underlying and essential similarities of vision.

Shange straddles the usually separate worlds of poetry, fiction and theater. She often transmutes a work, generally about African-American girls or women confronting men and the dominant culture, into several different genres. As a performer, she mixes the dramatic and stand-up, or at least did here, for the wild meditations on sex and on gender separatism she presented.

Harjo, the best writer among the poets of this fermenting end-of-the-century moment, projects as gentle and forgiving,

her politics of the disenfranchised absorbed in an earthy, all-encompassing spirituality. A member of the Creek tribe and a saxophonist, Harjo usually performs her poems with her jazz-reggae group, Poetic Justice.

Waldman, an heir to Allen Ginsberg, is a charismatic performer whose work, less interesting on the page than stage, spans a staggering range of references, all of Western and Eastern culture from both ironic male and presentational female points of view. She trades in satiric wit and humor as she builds her sometimes epic-length postmodern narratives.

She directs the writing program at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colo., and has performed for radio, video, television and theater. She knows how to work a crowd.

Her incantatory "To the Censorious Ones" addressed the self-styled arts policemen such as Sen. Jesse Helms. Using a deep-throated voice and male sexual imagery — parodies both of oracular religious rhetoric — she begins: "I am coming up from the tomb, men of war, just when you thought you had me down, in place,

hidden. I am coming up now. Can you feel the ground rumble under your feet. It's breaking apart. It's turning over. It's pushing up. It's thrusting into your point of view, your private property."

Tall and imposing, she rises to her full height, promising stories of women with lascivious tongues, sharp eyes and claws. She threatened with her aerobic fitness: "I've been working out. My muscles are strong." Then, claiming to lead up hell hounds ready to "bark and bite and scoff," she deflated the male-authored myth of Pandora's genital box of evils, crying out: "I'm opening the box. BOO!"

Finley, a regular at Sushu Performance and Visual Art, often deflates the political attacks on her and other performers with a similar refrain: "I'm only an artist."

In her AIDS-inspired "A Certain Level of Denial," recently performed at SDSU, Finley also becomes the suppressed material that the Helmses of the world fear — a free and honest woman exhorting the suffering imposed by narrow gender roles, by callous governments and abusive families.

Rosenthal's latest performance piece, "Zone," explores some of the same themes at this end-of-century moment, a time, as Harjo puts it, of incredible destruction and incredible possibilities. "With more than 100 people of color performing at UCLA as The Throngs, Rosenthal dramatized the wavering between a steady and a turbulent state, the clash between the massive, migrating nonwhite world and Western patriarchal civilization (and its attendant multinational capitalism) which may no longer be able to control it.

Writing with the body, Finley and Rosenthal, but also Reno and Kirkwood, shock audiences out of complacency with their language and their bodies.

In her earlier pieces, Finley objectified and symbolically abused her own body, stuffing its orifices with yams or covering her breasts with chocolate, the symbolic feces reflecting extremes of rape, sexual abuse and other assaults upon women. Descriptions of such activities triggered the much-publicized defunding of her work, along with that of three gay artists, by the National Endowment for the Arts.

The 1990 "A Certain Level of

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Tues/Wed, June 7-8	RAY CHARLES/sp. gst. Ernestine Anderson	8:00	\$38
Thur/Fri, June 9-10	THE ROBERT CRAY BAND	8:00	\$32
Sunday, June 12	MILTON NASCIMENTO/ZAP MAMA	7:30	\$23
Wednesday, June 15	STYLISTICS/DRAMATICS/CHI LITES	7:30	\$27
Friday, June 17	DAVID SANBORN	7:00/9:00	\$32
Sunday, June 19	BOBBY CALDWELL	7:00/9:00	\$20
Monday, June 20	EARL KLUGH/sp. gst. Cassandra Wilson	7:30	\$26
Tuesday, June 21	DR. JOHN/LEON RUSSELL	7:30	\$26
Friday, June 24	RICHARD ELLIOT	7:00/9:00	\$20
Sunday, June 26	OTTMAR LIEBERT & LUNA NEGRA	6:00/8:30	\$25
Mon/Tue, June 27-28	MANHATTAN TRANSFER	8:00	\$30
Wed/Thur, June 29-30	THE RIGHTEOUS BROTHERS	8:00	\$33
Thursday, July 7	GEORGE BENSON	7:00/9:00	\$28
Friday, July 8	FIRESIGN THEATRE	7:00/9:00	\$28
Mon/Tue, July 11-12	JAMES BROWN	8:00	\$38
Sunday, July 14	NEVILLE BROTHERS	7:30	\$32
Friday, July 15	PAULA POUNDSTONE	8:00	\$32
Sunday, July 17	JERRY LEE LEWIS	8:00	\$33
Thursday, July 21	ACOUSTIC ALCHEMY	8:00	\$30
Friday, July 22	RITA RUDDNER	7:00/9:00	\$20
Sunday, July 24	SMOKEY ROBINSON	7:00/9:00	\$20
Thursday, July 28	TOWER OF POWER/KIRK WHALUM	6:00/8:30	\$33
Friday, July 29	HIROSHIMA	7:30	\$23
Sunday, July 31	ART GARFUNKEL	7:00/9:00	\$23
Tue/Wed, August 2-3	AL JARREAU	8:00	\$33
Thursday, August 4	NORMAN BROWN/BONEY JAMES	8:00	\$38
Friday, August 5	DIANE SCHUUR/RAMSEY LEWIS	7:30	\$20
Sunday, August 7	MICHAEL NESMITH/sp. gst. Hellecasters	7:30	\$30
Thursday, August 11	KATHY MATTEA	7:30	\$23
Friday, August 12	DAVID BENOIT/KILAUEA	7:00/9:00	\$20
Sunday, August 14	BILL COSBY	7:30	\$23
Thursday, August 18	STRUNZ & FARAH	7:00/9:00	\$50
Friday, August 19	DENNIS MILLER	8:00	\$23
Sunday, August 21	LEE RITENOUR	7:00/9:00	\$22
Wednesday, August 24	JOAN BAEZ/sp. gst. Joe Henry	7:00/9:00	\$20
Friday, August 26	GEORGE CARLIN	7:30	\$26
Sunday, August 28	JOHN TESH	6:30/9:00	\$25
Tuesday, August 30	MARTY STUART	8:00	\$23

## This Summer, First Interstate Bank Brings Four of the World's Great Artists to San Diego

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<p><b>July 20, 1994</b> Yoav Talmi, Conducting Vladimir Feltsman, Piano San Diego Master Chorale Frank Almond, Director</p> <p>MOZART - Eine Kleine Nachtmusik PROKOFIEV - Piano Concerto No. 2</p>	<p><b>July 27, 1994</b> Yoav Talmi, Conducting Sarah Chang, Violin</p> <p>BACH - Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 SCHUBERT - Symphony No. 5 in B flat Major SIBELIUS - Violin Concerto</p>	<p><b>August 3, 1994</b> George Cleve, Guest Conductor André Watts, Piano</p> <p>MOZART - Overture to The Magic Flute RACHMANINOV - Piano Concerto No. 2 TCHAIKOVSKY - Symphony No. 5</p>	<p><b>August 17, 1994</b> Henry Lewis, Guest Conductor Marilyn Horne, Mezzo Soprano</p> <p>ROSSINI - Arias TBA American popular songs and other works.</p>
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