

Review: CSU brings Kafka to life

I never thought of Franz Kafka as a particularly funny guy — until I saw him through Walt Jones's eyes, that is.

The CSU Co-director of the Division of Dance and Theatre's sampling of some of Kafka's works makes the writer not only funny but also accessible, a feat for anyone who's tackled some of Kafka's more bizarre stories.

Jones's "Chrysalis: The Kafka Project" is a sampling of writings, including six of Kafka's major works and entries from his diaries and letters.

As the project writer and director, Jones clearly enjoyed the challenge of bringing Kafka's work to the stage, mixing the stories between the ridiculous ("Josephine the Singer") and the horrific ("In the Penal Colony").

The show opens with an excerpt from Kafka's first novel, the unfinished "Amerika," before quickly rolling into "A Report to an Academy," in which an ape tells a group of scientists why he chose to become a man.

The show's centerpiece is Kafka's most famous story, "The Metamorphosis," in which a man wakes up to discover he has transformed into a giant bug. The segment's soundtrack features original music

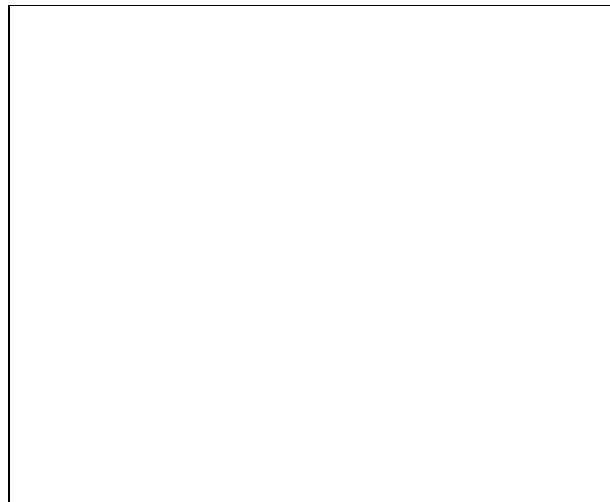
composed and performed by CSU faculty members James David and Peter Sommer.

Kudos to actors Michael Toland and Kat Springer who perform parallel versions of the main character, Gregor Samsa. Both actors truly exemplify the terror of this living nightmare; Toland in particular paints a dramatic picture for audiences, scrambling around the stage and up and down banisters (sans the help of wires or harnesses).

Toland also bookends the show with "Amerika" at the beginning and a bizarre-but-brilliant amalgamation of Kafka's diaries, letters and aphorisms at the end. Im-pressive is an understatement.

That surprising humor is best displayed in "Josephine the Singer, or, the Mouse Folk." In Kafka's last short story, about a mouse who has the ability to sing, or at least so he says. Willa Bograd, as the in-reality tone deaf mouse Josephine, takes the character beyond anything Kafka could have expected. Bograd also slays in a

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minor role as a horse in “The Country Doctor.”

Additional stories include “A Hunger Artist,” about a side-show artist whose act is literally starving himself to death, and the dark “In the Penal Colony,” which describes a complex machine that slowly carves the sentence of the condemned prisoner on his skin before killing him.

It’s a fitting choice to represent Kafka, who was renowned for his profoundly complex stories filled with bizarre and grotesque plot lines. Jeff Garland channels a bit of Peter Sellers in “Dr. Strangelove” with his officer, who finds himself the last proponent of the torture device.

The machine itself is left to the audience’s imagination, making it all the more horrific as the officer describes it. Other set pieces are just as “Kafkaesque” as one would imagine: random windows, doors in the floor and at odd angles, a bed frame standing vertically to best showcase the tortured soul lying upon it. The show’s crew, including Scenic Designer Maggie Seymour, Lighting Designer Alex Ostwald, Sound Designer Parker Stegmaier and Projections Designer Nicole Newcomb, creates a world that truly mirrors the disturbing imagery created in Kafka’s stories.

‘Chrysalis: The Kafka Project’

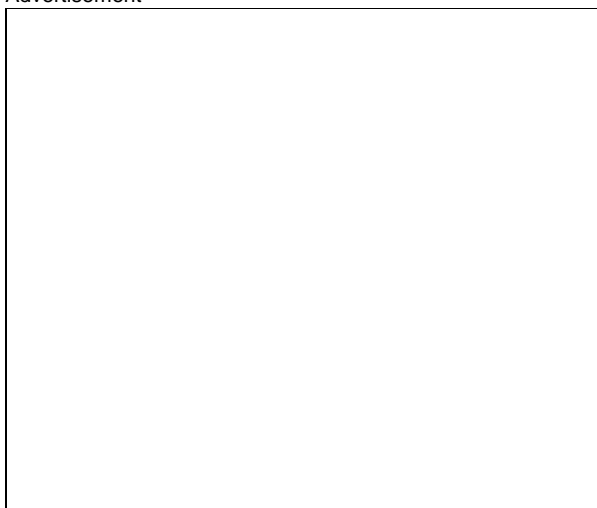
When: 7:30 p.m. today, Friday, Saturday and Sunday

Where: University Center for the Arts, 1400 Remington St., Fort Collins

Cost: \$18 general admission; \$8 for CSU students

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