

Underground Overhaul

Recalibrating the Yale Cabaret.

By Christopher Arnott

The Summer Cabaret at Yale

Performances Wed.-Sat., June 20-Aug. 11, at 217 Park St., New Haven. (203) 432-1567, summer-cabaret.org.

It was important for us to do work about process," says Mike Donahue. "We want to show four different ways of working and making theater." In doing so, he and his Yale Summer Cabaret cohorts Roberta Pereira and Stephanie Ybarra have shaken up the processes and formats the theater has subscribed to for years.

Every summer since the mid-'70s, a few Yale School of Drama students have run a youthful summer theater out of the Yale Cabaret space at 217 Park St. This is distinct from the school-year Yale Cabaret, where 20 student projects get staged for six performances each. The summer season typically involves four or five shows, which each run for two weeks. In the past, an ensemble acting company has been hired, with each actor performing in several shows.

This summer, Donahue, Pereira and Ybarra

started by dissolving the standard theater leadership model of artistic director and managing director. The three have declared themselves co-executive directors of the theater, splitting the workload according to their individual strengths and voting on all key decisions. Likewise, there are now two co-technical directors rather than the old standard of one and an assistant.

The exec-producing trio has furthered that democratic tendency

by letting interested Cabaret-goers vote for the play that closes the season. Despite having the everpopular Shakespeare among the four voices, the majority of the 200 votes went to Euripides' *The Bacchae*.

The acting ensemble concept has also been dismantled, with only a couple of performers appearing in more than one show. In other areas, a new ticket purchasing system is being

set up so that you buy tickets in advance rather than make reservations and pay at the door. You can also get better seats if you make dinner reservations.

The Cabaret season opens June 20 with *God is a DJ*, by German playwright Falk Richter. Donahue directed a different Richter play, *Electronic City*, for the school-year Yale Cabaret's 2005-06 season. That show turned the workaday world into a savage techno dance. *God is a DJ* is about a couple who turn their home life into an ongoing performance art piece. The Cabaret audience plays the role of the audience invited into the couple's home to watch them live their lives. The performers are a DJ and a VJ, so *God is a DJ* has a rich multimedia design. Donahue says he's excited to direct a play in which "multi-media is so integral to the piece, so necessary for storytelling." The experience, Donahue says, makes you question "what's real. There's this fractured authenticity."

The Pornographic Angel runs July 5-14, but has been workshoped for years and has been rehearsing at the Cabaret for several weeks now, blowing the usual two- or three-week summer-theater-rehearsal model to shit. Based on short stories by Brazilian writer Nelson Rodrigues, the piece originated with the Tantrum Theater troupe. Some Cabaret designers are piling on during its New Haven run, the first public exposure the piece has had. The results move on to New York's OHIO Theatre in September.

The Pornographic Angel is said to be highly stylized, and the next Cabaret show, *Eye*, may be even more so: Created and directed by Alex Knox, this storytelling exercise is performed using masks.

The final show, which brings Donahue back to the director's chair, is the aforementioned *Bacchae*, the timeless 2,400-year-old Greek tragedy of family honor, decadent rebellion, mass violence and bloodshed and spiritual possession. A popular piece during wartime, it's inspired radical political versions by Richard Schechner (*Dionysus in '69*), Chuck Mee (*Bacchae 2.1*) and Caryl Churchill (*A Mouthful of Birds*). Donahue hasn't yet decided what direction to take the play in. "Every time you think you find a specific reading for it, you turn the page and Euripides says you're wrong."

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PRODUCTIONAL PHOTO

The Summer Cabaret at Yale in rehearsal. The season opens June 20.