

TO: , Features Editor
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If you go

ALITHEA MIME THEATRE

What: Free preview of Nicholas Johnson's works to be performed at Warsaw's International Mime Art Festival

Where: Miller Concert Hall, Duerksen Fine Arts Center, WSU campus

When: Thursday, August 20, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

How much: Suggested donation \$5

WICHITA TROUPE TAKES MIME CREATIONS TO POLAND

Alithea Mime Theatre will revisit the art's roots at Warsaw festival.

Eighteen Wichita artists head to Poland this Saturday representing the only American mime company invited to perform at the International Mime Art Festival in Warsaw, August 22 – 31. Alithea Mime Theatre, of Wichita State University's College of Fine Arts, attended the first Warsaw festival in 1999 and returned in 2000.

Alithea (Greek for "truth") came to Wichita in 1997, when its founders and artistic directors, Nicholas Johnson and Sabrina Vasquez, joined the WSU dance department, Johnson as director and Vasquez as faculty.

Other travelers are technical directors Dan Williams and Denise Williams and 14 mimes, one of whom is 8-year old Zoe Johnson, daughter of the artistic directors.

The 13 adult mimes are graduates of WSU's dance department, mostly natives of Wichita: Maurice Sims, Ryan Squires, Chris Montiel, David Kellam, Angela Johnsen, Taurean Everett, Cody Proctor, Katy Kaufman, Courtney Mertes, Lyndsey Beebe, Jordan Ryan, Bethany Fiscus and Aubrey Hensley.

The young dancers are motivated by eagerness to learn from international peers and respect for Johnson's work. At the Johnson-Vasquez home August 2, Angela Johnsen, who went

on to join a modern dance company in New York, said emphatically, “If Nick’s work wasn’t fantastic, there’s no way I would be doing this.”

Nick Johnson has artistic roots in Polish mime, having studied with Stefan Niedzialkowski, creator of the American School of Polish Mime and founder of the Warsaw festival. Niedzialkowski was a student of Polish dancer and mime, Henryk Tomaszewski, a contemporary of the late Marcel Marceau.

Marceau established the French school of mime typified by solo performance, Johnson said, while Poles nurtured a virtuosic combination of theatre and dance. Johnson was mentored by both Marceau and Niedzialkowski, but Alithea’s uniqueness in the U.S. is its Polish heritage of company work.

Johnson’s pieces range from amusing to eerie to earthshaking. The power of the material requires “a harnessing of energy based on breathing,” said one dancer. “It’s a rhythm you tune in to.”

The Warsaw performance repeats the repertoire Alithea shared in its Wichita debut in January at the Orpheum Theatre. Johnson recalls the night as “a huge success. We held the curtain for 30 minutes with people packed in the lobby and lined up outdoors to buy tickets.”

Though their Wichita family and friends came with no idea what to expect, the dancers said, the crowd’s response was warm.

“Our dancers were ecstatic that their home town turned out for them,” said Johnson.

“There was pride,” added Vasquez, “which made us all bond a little closer.”

While Poland is a new destination for some, others remember Alithea’s tour to China and **Taiwan(WCDT)** in 2004, where they received “ultimate respect”: a red carpet was literally rolled out and each received a dozen roses on stage.

The Wichita artists nurse no illusion of earning a living as mimes, however. “Maybe in Europe, but not in the U.S.,” they agreed. Johnson counts on donations to cover airfare and hotel rooms but is walking on faith, not on ground, in conjuring salaries and per diems.

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