

'Walk with Me' makes poetry out of tragedy

BY BARRY GAINES
For the Journal

The fifth annual Tricklock Company Revolutions International Theatre Festival is in its second week bringing a remarkable array of theatrical talent to town.

On Thursday, I attended a performance of "Walk with Me" presented by The Performance Project at UNM's Theatre X.

For five years, The Performance Project has created voice and movement presentations with prison inmates anxious to find an outlet for their anger and frustration and a voice for their pain.

The company from Massachusetts is made up of seven artists, four of whom

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have been incarcerated. Most are men and women of color. They perform for themselves as well as their audiences, and their voices are strong — literally and figuratively.

The group began with stylized movements to a background of rap music. Jumping, rolling, pausing, gesturing, they formed and dissolved patterns. When the vocal element — monologues, scenes and poetry — was added, the themes of violence, poverty, drugs, broken homes, and shattered dreams became clearer.

Felix J. Vazquez and Thea Som stood on opposite sides of the stage in small rectangles of light about the size of prison

cells, sharing an antiphonal lament for the friends and family who were killed as they grew up. The refrain was "I won't live until I'm 30." Vazquez later described his life as a 10-year-old whose heroin-addict mother has abandoned him.

"He sitting at home all alone, no phone/three days now, since she's been gone/The fridge was empty all along."

"Growing up quick, tired of waitin'/He's holding it together, but inside he's slowly breakin'/Wondering was he a blessing to life or was God mistaken?"

Som, whose Cambodian parents survived the Khmer Rouge killing fields, spoke of neighborhood killing fields that he has to endure. Sheila

Marie Petigny and Naimah Zulmadelle Petigny portrayed a tender mother and daughter, demonstrating the possibility of love and tenderness in the midst of hate and violence.

Pam Ann Bardsley told the story of a girl forced to leave home because of sexual abuse from her stepfather. No one would believe her, and she became determined never to be silenced again.

Court Dorsey, clad in a lavender jacket with a garish flower in his lapel, played the continuing role of Will Kidman, TV reporter. In a fine satiric skit dealing with the problem of recidivism, reality television came to the 'hood as a recent parolee was offered a large cash prize if he could get through his old block without

violating his parole. If he lost, it was back to jail.

Some of the most compelling poetry was written and performed by Herschelle Reaves. In "I have issues," she powerfully confronted the white liberal audience that supports her efforts to reclaim her life but who would not wish to spend a day in her skin.

In the final segment, the cast wore oversized, menacing green fists that suggested the burden of carrying the anger that the clenched fists signify.

These performers and their director, Julie Lichtenberg, are admirable. They confront the stigma of prison without bitterness and work to make poetry out of tragedy.