

Directors' Diary

Synaesthetic Theatre is known for developing its plays in an extensive and detailed process that can sometimes take upwards of a full year, and next February's **Icon** is no exception. With a process that began in early 2002, **Icon** has been through countless hours of meetings, conceptual discussions, writing sessions, performance workshops, technical research, rehearsals, and film shoots. What follows are some of the thoughts of directors **Joy Leonard** and **Chris Nichols** as they approach the culmination of what promises to be one of *Synaesthetic's* most ambitious productions to date.



DIRECTORS' DIARY, DECEMBER 2002

Out of the primordial soup of concepts, visions, associations, questions, images and goals. . . a strange creature emerges. And Lo, we have named it **Icon**. And it has five limbs. In other words, after many transformations and mutations we are now working with an ensemble of five—playing the roles of Narcissus, Echo and various Famous Icons. The *Icon* actors (company members **Maximilian Frey** and **Margaret O'Sullivan**, and newcomer **Ziedah F. Giovanni**) are working exclusively with found material, text and images from film and television. For those of our fans that are old movie buffs, this show should be a real treat. . .featur-

ing moments from such classics as *Casablanca*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Psycho*,

"If every age has its disorder—hysteria in Freud's Vienna, addiction in the eighties, depression in the nineties—ours seems to be the age of Narcissism. According to the encyclopedia of mental disorders. . . someone suffering from narcissism feels special, entitled, arrogant; lacks empathy; is preoccupied with fantasies of success; and is exploitative. Which pretty much describes everyone I know. . ."

(Rebecca Johnson, Vogue October 2002)

and many more. Not all of the references are to "old" movies; folks like Travis from *Taxi Driver* and the mad prophet of

Network also have found a voice in this world of reconstructed fantasies and self-discovery, where familiar moments are broken down, rearranged and generally turned inside out. These scenes provide us with a powerful vocabulary of images and sounds, already rich with associations, which are used to express desire, rejection, delusion and recognition.

Narcissus and Echo (newcomer Clinton Powell and company member Tina West Chavous) are busy writing text, devising movement sequences, and helping to connect the layers of media references into a personal journey. Narcissus gazes into the water/the silver screen, lured by the beautiful illusions,

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Interview: Iconic Themes



Can you tell us a little bit about what *Icon* is about?

Clinton Powell (Narcissus): *Icon* is about icons. Not those pesky little pictures of things on your computer, but the greats of movies and television. Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, and Shirley Temple leap to mind as examples. *Icon* is also about how these figures become more than human.

They embody ideologies, beliefs, hopes and dreams of countless individuals.

Tina West Chavous (Echo): *Icon* is about the search for self within an environment that tells you that "self" and specifically your "self" are not good enough. It's about the movies, with their beautiful women, dashing men, oversimplified plots, and ability to make a happy ending out of the

In *Icon*, **Tina West Chavous** and **Clinton Powell** are portraying the mythic figures of Echo and Narcissus, trapped in a media-infested landscape of reflection. In addition to performing in *Icon*, the two actors are generating new material based on classic-movie text and helping to structure the narrative of the piece. *Synaesthetic Viewpoint* sat down with them to get some insight into the piece as it develops towards production.

Holocaust. Now, I love movies and a lot of the movies I love are about beautiful people dealing with marginally tragic events only to come out more beautiful because of these events.

CP: *Icon* explores how these figures populate our sub-consciousness allowing for a common language of movie quotes

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Icon Benefit

This summer, *Synaesthetic Theatre* hosted its annual benefit party at The West Side Tavern in New York City. Attendees were encouraged to dress as their favorite Icon and, happily, did not disappoint. Before long, our innocent fundraiser became a meeting ground for Marilyn Monroe, Sonny & Cher, Charlie Chaplin, Patti Smith, Denzel Washington, a pair of Norma Desmonds, a pair of Audrey Hepburns and many other popular figures from the past 100 years. Music was provided by Rench, who will also compose the original score for our upcoming production of **Icon**. There was also a raffle later in the evening where over 15 prizes were handed out to lucky guests and donors.



Ozzy Osbourne (*James Ford*), Norma Desmond (*David Crittenden*), Betty Crocker (*Margaret O'Sullivan*), and the King of Siam (*John DesRoches*)



Michael Jackson (*Ziedah F. Giovannelli*), Audrey Hepburn (*Tina West Chavous*), and Janis Joplin (*Joy Leonard*)



Mae West (*Paula A. Marchiel with brother, Adam*), Andy Warhol (*Chris Nichols*), and Charlie Chaplin (*Maximilian Frey*)



Norma Desmond (*Claire Mullen*), Marilyn Monroe (*Beth Krafchik*), Skyy Vodka Girl (*Margaret Trigg*) and Betty Crocker




Audrey Hepburn (*Clinton Powell*), Marilyn Monroe, and the Virgin Mary (*Aubrey Hardwick*)

Synaesthetic Theatre would like to thank the following people and organizations for providing invaluable support and raffle prizes at our latest fundraiser: West Side Tavern, Battlestar, Penguin Putnam, Clive Barker, HarperCollinsChildren'sBooks, Cliff Shikler, Claire Mullen, Blueman Group Productions, Members of Synaesthetic Theatre, Tower Records, and United Artists Theaters.



www.i-con.tv

Log onto www.i-con.tv and check out Synaesthetic Theatre's newest website companion to our upcoming multimedia production *Icon*. This interactive flash experience was developed by director **Chris Nichols** and designer **David Crittenden**. Inside you will be able to navigate through a series of collages packed with hidden sound and video clips, games and footnotes about the stars that have helped to shape our modern media-space. All of the collages on the site were hand made by Crittenden using images from books, magazines, and old movie stills. They were then scanned into a computer by Nichols, who was responsible for animating the static artwork and filling it with interactivity. Pictures morph, sound clips from movies play, and dramatic interruptions surprise the user with striking scenes from classic films. New pages will be added regularly as we get closer to opening night of *Icon*, so check back often. 

Training Workshops

As *Synaesthetic Theatre* continues to produce original work, our commitment to offering regular training workshops in experimental theater and performance techniques remains a central focus for the company. Our most recent workshop in the Viewpoints technique took place in October 2002. (Photos to the right)



In May of 2003 we will be offering an **Intensive Workshop with artists Steve Wangh (master-teacher and author of *Acrobat of the Heart*) and Wendell Beavers (master-teacher, Viewpoints).**

Participants in this workshop will receive comprehensive training in techniques that utilize body, voice and emotion. We will

begin accepting applications for this intensive workshop in March 2003.

If you are interested in attending this master-class or in attending one of our Viewpoints Workshops you can learn more at www.synaesthetic-theatre.com/workshops.



Interview *continued from page 1*

and gestures that even those that have not seen a particular movie will still know.

TWC: When I turn on the TV, when I'm online, when I'm walking down the street, commercials, pop-ups, billboard, advertisements of all kinds are talking to me. *Icon* is about what happens when you listen. And then it's about beginning to hear your own voice amidst all the other noise. And then it's about not recognizing your own voice and being scared of your own voice. I hope that it's about using your own voice.

How does the myth of Narcissus and Echo relate to the idea of *Icon*?

TWC: [Early in the process] we began to think of the myth of Narcissus, who sits by a pond staring at a reflection he doesn't realize is his, longing for love. We thought that he brought with him a wonderful sense of stagnation and a complete lack of self-awareness.

CP: He is, perhaps, the first couch potato. Sitting and staring for hour after hour, day after day.

TWC: He's an advertiser's dream.

CP: Narcissus, in *Icon*, is a young man who can't escape from the media loop that he is stuck in. He sees himself in the many Icons that populate his world.

TWC: And Echo's the other side of this. I think of my character as the one who doesn't listen when told, "Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain." She is what will eventually prompt Narcissus to listen to his own voice.

What is your relationship to mass media and how does that relate to the show?

TWC: I feel like I'm a media-savvy kind of person. But then I'll watch the MTV awards and not recognize any of the performers or winners.

CP: One of my earliest thoughts that I remember actually having was when I was about three or four, and I realized that my life was not a television show. I remember being extremely excited and scared to know that what happened to me wasn't in a little box and that my problems may not be solved in half hour increments.

TWC: I feel like I know what's going on in the world, but there's a large part of mass media that I just don't care about. And I

can't get past this. I can't look at an issue of *Cosmo* and believe what they have to tell me anymore. I'm not too short. I'm not ugly. I won't benefit from any of their "How to Please Your Man using only a can of hairspray and broccoli" articles. I guess that's my stance on mass media: I just don't believe.


If you were to compare *Icon* to an old movie or TV Show, which one would it be and why?

CP: Maybe a much darker version of *Laugh-In*.

TWC: *Icon* takes a look at the world of movies and TV in a way that jumps from one thing to another in a whirlwind sequence, sometimes referring back to earlier points in the show, much like *Laugh-In*.

CP: The seeming randomness and "out-of-nowhereness" of *Laugh-in* that work to get a message.

TWC: Also, the focus on the catch phrase and quotes. Plus, I hope to have the opportunity to do some go-go dancing.

For more information about the show as it develops, please visit www.i-con.tv 

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trapped by his inability to embrace his beloved. Echo, his would-be lover and tormentor, is forced to compete for his attention in a rigged race of larger-than-life beauty.

This is shaping up to be a dreamier piece than we have done in awhile, perhaps since *ROT* in '99. A hypnotic soundscape and multiple live feeds contribute to the sensation of drifting in a sea of sound bytes, reflections and

fragmented images. A sea in which our disassociated Everyman, a media junkie like so many of our generation, may well drown. Deconstructed scenes from films you thought you knew provide the interior language with which Narcissus will define himself, once and for all. So mark your calendars now, folks, and get ready to go a little mad at Rick's with Norma and Norman and all the gang. Are we talking to you? That's right, you and all those


wonderful people out there in the dark. . . join us for another amazing trip over the rainbow!

Icon

February 20, 2003–March 15, 2003

Thursday–Saturday

Milagro Theatre at CSV Cultural Center
107 Suffolk Street, New York City, NY

www.i-con.tv 



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Thursday–Saturday

**Milagro Theatre at
CSV Cultural Center
107 Suffolk Street, New York City, NY**

To Purchase tickets call 212-352-3101 or visit www.i-con.tv

Synaesthetic Theatre 

851 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11213

syn-ae-s-thet-ic, *adj.* characterizes a work of art which produces harmony out of different or opposing impulses.