

Vancouver's Women In View festival has dual purpose

Adventure and affirmative action

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At last weekend's second annual Women In View festival — a festival of music, theatre, dance and performance art created or produced by women, held in Vancouver's downtown eastside — one participant told the story of hiring a plane to skywrite "Lesbians have more fun" at her niece's wedding. Also, a woman recited poetry about crows, Joan of Arc and a river, while wearing a fish strapped across her chest. And a group of Latin American men told about their experiences as Canadian immigrants.

Whoah, you say. *Men at a woman's performance festival?*

"I thought it was a perfect choice," says festival organizer Jane Heyman. "We're supposed to keep people surprised."

There are two goals, really, behind the Women In View festival. One goal is concerned with creating an alternative literature of women's narratives and drama. The aim is to be adventurous and experimental. Another goal is old-fashioned affirmative action, an attempt to redress the imbalance in the performing arts of male-written, directed and performed pieces.

The men's theatre show in the festival, entitled *Crossing Borders*, still fits the bill. It was created by a woman, Lina de Guevara. Last year, she presented one of the hits of the first Women In View festival, a show about the experiences of women immigrants.

The organizers found it natural to include the companion piece. After all, about 20 per cent of the audience for last year's Women In View festival was male, about exactly the same percentage as attend other cultural events in the city.

The atmosphere throughout the weekend was buoyant, as more than 5,000 festivalgoers moved through the four venues (two theatres in the Firehall Theatre; and nearby St. James Church and The Pitt Gallery), exchanging information and animated critiques.

Although the entries this year were picked by jury (about 40 from 140 entries), the quality was

not only diverse but uneven. Some shows such as *Survivors*, about father-daughter incest, fell into the worthy-but-trite category. Others, such as *Modern Notes of Persuasion*, a one-woman show (written by Brenda Robson, acted by Patricia Tedford) about the trials and successes of a newly divorced modern woman, had the punchy, but lightweight quality of a TV sitcom.

In the storytelling line, two shows stood out. *Sun and Shadow* was an unusual dramatization of a true story about two women friends — one a Toronto actress with a fascination with Chinese culture, the other a Chinese choreographer who was in Canada at the time of the Tiananmen massacre and decided to defect. The actual women — Janis Nickleson and Sun Gui-Zhen — acted out their artless, but charming, story onstage.

One of the hits of the festival was *Great Explanations: Four Lesbian Stories*, with Jackie Crossland performing stories she wrote with collaborator Nora D. Randall. Crossland, an actress of immense size and talent, told wonderful deadpan tales of a woman named Maureen Mary Hagerty who grows up gay in a small prairie town.

In one story, Hagerty, having told her parents she is gay, is incapable of letting them know she is merely sharing rent with the woman she is living with, a woman whom the parents are dotting on as an in-law. "I was," she says with shame-filled lowered gaze, "a closet single person."

On the experimental edge, *Jojo* by Sandra Lockwood (the woman with the fish) was an intriguing multidisciplinary performance, integrating projected film images, music, dance with Lockwood's own elemental brooding poetry.

There was a surrealist humor intrinsic to Lockwood's presentation, although her mode of performance remained deadly earnest. With her work falling somewhere between Quebec performance artist Michel Lemieux and rock star Kate Bush, Lockwood is, unmistakably, an artist for the nineties. She has found a way of offering genuinely good poetry to a generation raised on the sensory overload of MTV or MuchMusic.



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Sandra Lockwood, a multidisciplinary performer at Women In View festival: she has found a way of offering genuinely good poetry to a generation raised on the sensory overload of MTV or MuchMusic.