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'Paint' a performance canvas

By Carol Egan
Special to The Advertiser

Following the success of last summer's first Salon Series program, "La Madonna," IONA Contemporary Dance Theatre has another event that's sure to dazzle the eye and stimulate the senses. "Paint by Number" will be presented today and Saturday at the King Kalakaua Plaza in Waikiki.

The performance space on the fourth floor of the building is a large empty room that is slated to become a Japanese restaurant. "Because of the nature of this piece, we are plasticizing the space and giving people in the first rows of seats plastic sheets to protect them," said IONA artistic director Cheryl Flaharty.

Protection may indeed be necessary, judging from the recent rehearsal I attended at IONA's studio (my pants and purse still bear witness to the event; I was assured, however, that the paints would wash off). In addition to using mustard containers to squirt each other and their surroundings, the 12 dancers slosh, dab and dribble bright paints from metal pails and large metal bowls. Flaharty has settled on Crayola tempera as the paint of choice.

"This whole show is based on an improvisation I've been doing for a long time," Flaharty explained. "I ask the dancers to 'paint' an imaginary space with their bodies, using different body parts and brushing techniques to move through space. Eventually I decided to try using real paint." This is a distinct turnaround from the elaborate costumes and sets Flaharty usually creates for her productions.

The work, an extended structured improvisation, is roughly divided into three sections, each of which includes several directions for each group of dancers. To facilitate the process, Flaharty rehearses with four dancers at a time. The night I attended, she was working with the red/yellow/orange group.

The difficulty she perceives is "how to paint and dance at the same time; how to be aware of your actions and your audience at all times."

"It's turning out to be quite humorous, much to my surprise," Flaharty said. "It wasn't my intention, but there's something so taboo about making a mess. I think that's where the humor comes in."

As far as cost goes, the Salon Series is by no means done on a shoestring, but it is still much less expensive than a production mounted on stage.

"The cost of paint and brushes is high, and we just have to rehearse with the paint. I love working from the pure white set and adding the color. It's very exciting."



Maile Baran, Chandra Miars and Liz Grote are among the performers in IONA Contemporary Dance Theatre's "Paint by Number."

Carl Hefner

'Paint by Number'

By IONA Contemporary Dance Theatre

8 p.m. today and Saturday

King Kalakaua Plaza, fourth floor

\$20 general, \$17 advance

528-0506

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CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL /
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Iona dancer Chandra Miars rehearses for
"Paint by Number."

Dirty Dancing

A local dance troupe combines painting and movement in a show

By Jacquelyn Carberry
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I'm running late and I rush into King Kalakaua Plaza, hop into the elevator and wait expectantly for it to move. Nothing. The computerized voice tells me it is not possible to reach the floor I want. I rush back downstairs.

I'm trying to reach the Waikiki building's fourth floor, apparently shut off to the public since the All-Star Cafe closed. The people in the Niketown store downstairs graciously help this marooned visitor, finding the right person with the key for the mysterious elevator.

Finally, stepping out onto the fourth floor, I wonder if I've made a mistake. I see a large group of people milling about, mostly in underwear and beat-up clothes, a bare room and some people further off in the distance. Is this a dressing room? A bathroom? I seize upon the first fully dressed person I see.

Thankfully, it's Cheryl Flaharty, the artistic director of the Iona Contemporary Dance Theatre, and it seems I've arrived just in time.

The Color of Dance

Iona Salon Series presents "Paint by Number"

Where: 4th floor, Niketown building, King Kalakaua Plaza, 2080 Kalakaua Ave.

When: 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday

Tickets: \$17 advance and \$20 at the door, available at the Hawaii Theatre box office, online at www.hawaiitheatre.com, or charge-by-phone 528-0506

Call: 262-0060

The dance troupe is holding a Saturday afternoon rehearsal for its newest Salon show "Paint by Number." The dancers are wearing their oldest, makeshift workout clothes, soon to be doused with tempera paint.

The four male and eight female dancers are not only the focal point of this weekend's shows, they also are the props during the two performances. "I'm very interested in the skin of the dancers, the whites, the golds and silver," Flaharty said. "I'm very interested in the outside shell of the dancers. The paint transforms them into different animals and people."

In Iona's newest production -- through the use of paint, a bare room and accompanying music by the Quadraxion neo-jazz band -- the troupe will explore themes of war, passion, humanity and materialism.

"There is beauty and sensuousness and there's also humor," said Flaharty.

This is the first rehearsal in the plaza space with all 12 dancers and the band. The entire space is empty except for the people in it. The dancers and a simple backdrop of six pieces of fabric will serve as the canvas for "Paint by Number." After the shows, the cloth panels will be available for sale.

For one dancer, Laura Brucia-Hamm, the biggest challenge of this structured improvisation is "putting dance and paint together to make artwork on a canvas and make something appealing," she said after rehearsal, while waiting to scrub paint off her body.

The paint being used? Buckets and buckets of Crayola washable paint. The troupe used about 10 gallons of paint during every previous rehearsal at Flaharty's home.

Iona holds a series of performances two to three times a year at a variety of locations around Oahu. "Cheryl has taken dance out of the traditional studio and is putting it on the streets for younger people," said Crystal Brewster, Iona's managing director.

The owners of the plaza accepted the group's experiment with color. "They didn't mind paint on the floor," said Flaharty, although the floor and the first

row of spectators will be draped in plastic.

"With the tempera color, it's kind of reminiscent of Gallagher," said Brewe, referencing the comedian's infamously messy shows.



CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL /
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Iona dancers Chandra Miars, left, and Geneva Rivera, rehearsed for the dance performance "Paint by Number," which will be held on Friday and Saturday on the fourth floor of the Niketown building in Waikiki. The performance is the second production of the Iona salon series.

EVIDENCE OF Iona's newest production exists at Flaharty's studio -- splashes of paint still color her ceiling. "It was so hard the very first few rehearsals," she said. "The whole studio was plasticized. It was a challenge getting paint attractively on each other and not getting too much on each other. It ended up looking like one big mudball at first. You also had to be aware of the foot factor, people slipping."

Conceptually, "Paint by Number" is based on a book Flaharty read, "The Disappearance of the Universe," about the search for spiritualism despite the lure of materialism. "Everything in the material world has color," she said. "(But then) out of color comes separation or duality. Blue is jealous of red or they're attracted to each other."

The live music echoes the production's experimental sensibility.

Working with simple directions from Flaharty, the band "was just playing for ourselves and having fun with it," said drummer Jonathan Hereaux of the Caribbean, rumba and jazz-inspired music Quadraxon usually plays.

"We were hyper-aware of each other," said bassist Susan Capp of the dancers and musicians.

Much of the show's music takes its cue from the band's CD, "Just a Reminder Note," with improvisational adjustments made for the shows. Three songs have been condensed into one; another is embellished with

somber bowing on Capp's bass to mimic "The Birth of Color," the first dance sequence.

"Both the dancers and the band are experimenting," said Brewe.

"We were trying to match Cheryl's vision into music, and match a color chaos," said Hereaux. "Cheryl is great because she gives you a little bit of (direction) and allows you to go with it."

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