

Spoletto Today

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CALENDAR

JUNE 10 Today

Spoletto

11 a.m.: Chamber Music IX, Dock Street Theatre. 1¼ hours. \$25.

1 p.m.: Chamber Music IX, Dock Street Theatre. 1¼ hours. \$25.

5 p.m.: Music: Westminster Choir, Cathedral of St. Luke and St. Paul. 1½ hours. \$37, \$32, \$25 (limited view).

5 p.m.: Intermezzo IV, St. Matthew's Lutheran Church. 1¼ hours. \$25.

6 p.m.: Music Theater: Cinderella, Emmett Robinson Theatre. 1½ hours. \$35, children 12 and under \$20.

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SPOLETOTODAY.COM

BLOGS: Check out our Spoletto blogs from the Goldring Arts Journalism Program students covering the festival.

SOCIAL MEDIA: Follow SpolettoToday on Facebook, and @spoletotoday on Twitter. To tip off your fellow festival-goers, make sure to include #spotoday when you tweet.

SCHEDULES: Find our special combined calendar section online at postandcourier.com/spoletotoday.

FEEDBACK: SpolettoToday wants to hear from you. Comment on the posts or send an e-mail to SpolettoToday@postandcourier.com.

SPOLETOTODAY BUZZ

7 Days, 7 Questions — 4 Days to Go!

Charleston Scene (@chasscene) wants to know: What is your favorite post-performance party spot? Follow @chasscene and reply with #spotoday at the end. Find the your answers on SpolettoToday.com.

Classical Curiosity

Check out what Brooklyn Rider's Colin Jacobsen listens to when he isn't performing by visiting "What's On Your iPod?"

Audio Alert

Love Radiohead? So does Adam. And he wants you to know that there is a band coming to Charleston this Sunday that plays classical arrangements of Radiohead covers. For more info visit "Beat on the Street."

Sweet Tooth

Satisfy your need for something sweet by checking out

'Oyster' mixes the fantastic, frightening

STRANGE STUFF

BY JASON FOX BERGER
Special to *The Post and Courier*

Feathers and freaks collide with fairy tale imagery to form Inbal Pinto's and Avshalom Pollack's fantastical creation "Oyster."

With vague yet evocative titles such as "Trout," "Hydra," and the intriguingly named "Boobies," their work blends Pinto's background in dance and Pollack's in theater to take their audiences to never-before-seen places.

"We like creating fantastic worlds and creatures," said Pollack, an actor who had never worked in dance before joining forces with Pinto in 1992. "Strange stuff."

Now the "strange stuff" in "Oyster" is coming to Spoletto Festival USA. The show has been touring the globe since premiering in France in 1999.

Part dance, part theater, part acrobatics performance, the circus-themed work

features an 11-person cast of clowns, contortionists, pale-faced dancing ghouls and performers on strings functioning as life-sized marionettes. The elaborate costumes and abrupt movements create a show that resembles less a classic dance piece than a children's fairy tale told at high speed with impressive, and sometimes frightening, results.

The Spoletto program guide describes "Oyster" as being "inspired by" the work of similarly strange filmmaker Tim Burton ("Edward Scissorhands," "Beetlejuice," "Alice in Wonderland"). The title was taken from Burton's collection of illustrated poems ("The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy & Other Stories"), Pollack said. He is quick to point out, though, that this piece is no adaptation. The Burton connection is just another example of his love of simple language.

"We liked the sounds of the word," explained Pollack. "Like the piece, there's so many ways to interpret it. But we just took the word."

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GADI DAGON

A marionette pulls her own strings (above) and ghostly clowns are frozen in shock (below) in "Oyster," a production of Spoletto Festival USA.



'Oyster' fantastic, frightening

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But if "Oyster" isn't a Tim Burton poem come to life, where exactly did its garish, Burton-like imagery come from?

From whatever strands of expressionist-flavored inspiration hit its creators, Pollack said. He points to the 1932 film "Freaks" as an example. He was inspired not by its story of a band of cruelly abused circus performers, but by a single visual element: a hat with a feather that one of the "freaks" was wearing. He quickly found a place for this hat in "Oyster."

But the show isn't built entirely around feathered hats and suggestive titles. Some of "Oyster's" more thematic inspirations stem from its creator's lives. "One influence [was] memories that Inbal had of dance camp when she was a child," Pollack recalled. "The wish and will of the students to be perfect... What we create is putting not-so-perfect people trying to be perfect, and we kind of work with that contradiction on stage."

This quest for perfection is enacted by a cast with extraordinarily diverse backgrounds. Some performers come with classical ballet experience. Others have studied modern dance.

Zvika Fishzon is an actor who joined the company nearly ten years ago without any professional dance experience. Thanks to the troupe's unorthodox style, he was able to put his training in mime movement, clowning, and acrobatics to good use.

"What I saw in them was that (their work) was all part of a fantasy that I really liked," Fishzon recalled. "And because I come from a physical acting background, I fit in with them."



EYAL LANDESMAN

A life-size ballerina marionette dances on her strings in "Oyster," a production for Spoleto Festival USA.

The similarly diverse music ranges from classical opera to the eerily metallic sounds of Tuvan throat-singing. When all these disparate elements come together it is still difficult to classify exactly what "Oyster" is. Those looking for a cohesive narrative thread may walk away disappointed. Pollack himself is much more concerned with the show's psychological effect on an audience than with their literal interpretation, he said.

"We look at our pieces as

machines that trigger emotion," he said. "They connect to other people without a spoken language but with an emotional language, a visual language. The great thing about doing this and it working is that there's this very magical kind of link we create. Something happens to the audience."

Jason Berger is a Goldring Arts Journalism Program writer. Reach him at jberge03@syr.edu.