

Taking a Cue from NATURE

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at the Center for Spirituality & Healing



On June 2 TigerLion Arts debuted their walking-play NATURE. The play explores the colorful relationship between contemporaries Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, as men and philosophers. Taking place at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, the play was a close to the first full day of the fourth annual Ways of Knowing Symposium, focusing on Whole Systems Healing. This was the first year that this special Center offering was open to the public. The event brings together a diverse audience of medical and

healing professionals in an environment focused on learning, networking and exploring specific topics.

Tyson Forbes, a direct descendent of the heralded poet and philosopher, was cast in the role of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Forbes explains, “I feel like this character is deep within my bones and I needed to unearth him.” In this case more than any other the process was about “going back to what feels right as a grandchild of [Ralph Waldo Emerson]... [I’ve] used my intuition to guide me through this process.” His character, although immediately charismatic, developed from a steadfast and pompous elite into a man of understanding and insecurities. In contrast, Samuel D. Elmore, cast as Thoreau, won over the audience gradually. Throughout NATURE, Thoreau struggles with negotiating his ideas within himself and his difficulties produce passions that inspire dedicated action.



Dancing children, strolling musicians and chatting men and women mingled with the audience preceding the opening of the play. The audience was lead through the lush Minnesota Landscape Arboretum from scene to scene with the

benefit of a charming and comedic guide, Markell Kiefer, the play’s creative producer and director. Cast and audience made their way to unique scenes staged within the arboretum. Within this structure the guests were invited to interact with the surroundings in a new way, through the lenses of two of history’s greatest natural philosophers debating issues of nature, progress and humanity.

A guide is just one added feature of a walking-play that aims to address some of its format's unique challenges. Distractions are a key factor for the producers, directors and actors of such a performance. Planes flying overhead, pedestrians and weather can all create a situation that detracts from the performance. They can also create unique opportunities. "You can't cue a flock of geese to fly over your scene with the beautiful cinematic light of dusk and a rich blue sky over-head in a theater. It just happens and the effect is magical," says Forbes, the production's co-star and Executive Artistic Producer, as he reflected on a moment from the June performance.

With the stunning surroundings cast in a warm sunset light, the Arboretum served as a natural, three-dimensional stage for the performance. Walking along the paths, the landscape was complimented by the musical sprinklings of the ensemble. From traditionally elegant vocalists and violinists to the surprising use of bagpipe and percussive transitions, the talented musicians of the ensemble forged an emotional connection that held its own in creating a unique story telling experience.

TigerLion Arts creates works that "awaken, inform, and delight." Although Kiefer introduced the performance as "an ultrasound to a play in its embryonic stage," NATURE proved to be nothing less than a captivating and inspiring reminder of our inherent connection to nature and each other.