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Voice Afire presents “Kafka Shorts”

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By Marcina Zaccaria

It is rare to find an evening at the theater that features classical music, dance, and great literature. VoiceAfire presented “Kafka Shorts,” a Concert and Wine Tasting that took place on Friday, May 30 at Tenri Cultural Institute.

Voice Afire Pocket Opera and Cabaret is dedicated to creating performances that are “Chamber Music as Theater.” The company chose text from Franz Kafka, best known for his work with “The Metamorphosis” and “The Trial.” Kafka’s themes of alienation were clear in the original live music performance piece inspired by and using text from “The Parables” by Franz Kafka. All in all, Voice Afire made a strong showing with “Kafka Shorts,” and the evening was a careful blend of music and performance.

The piece was thought-provoking without being esoteric. Ray Luedeke adapted the Kafka Shorts, using a two person cast that featured Paula Llapur and Eric Gravez. The performances were lively and engaging. The performers used the gallery space in a smart way, effortlessly flowing through a devised stage space while finding meaning in Kafka’s challenging ideas.

Paula Llapur, who originally grew up in Chile, brought her modern dance skills seamlessly to the gallery floor. Eric Gravez gave breath to Kaka’s words, finding nuance while speaking the writer’s text. The event was directed by Dan Swern of CoLAB Arts and sponsored by the American Composers Alliance. It was a poetic production. An adept string quartet accompanied the performers. Gravez entered onto the stage with a dark umbrella. At one point, he climbed a ladder to reveal how the city might have looked to Kafka, a Czech writer who eventually died from tuberculosis.

The evening also featured a sampling of string quartets by Kenneth Fuchs, Matthew Davidson, and John S. Gray. The Voice Afire String Quartet includes top NYC violinists Artur Kaganovskiy and Julianne Klopotic, violist Ann Roggen, and cellist Lawrence Zoernig. The evening also featured “Quartet op. 74 mvt. 1” by David Popper. Other selections included “String Quartet No. 1,” “Quartetto Dell’Arte mvts. 1 & 5, Preludio & Tarantella Tumultosa,” and “Quartet No. 4 in one movement.” The music made for a blissful evening.

Voice Afire began presenting interdisciplinary work in Canada in 2007. The theater company has taken on interdisciplinary performances about Chilean poet Pablo Neruda and Puccini. “Kafka Shorts” took place at

the Tenri Cultural Institute. Tenri Cultural Institute is a non-profit organization founded in 1991 with the mission of “drawing together the multi-ethnic people of New York City to engage in cross-cultural dialogue and exchange.”

Tenri Cultural Institute is located at 43A West 13th Street in NYC. Additional information on Voice Afire can be found on www.voiceafire.com.