

OFF-OFF BROADWAY REVIEW on AISLE SAY

Nothing Exists

Written and performed by Copernicus

Directed by Christopher Sanderson

One Dream Theatre

Non-union production (closed)

Review by John Michael Koroly

Copernicus was last seen stalking Washington Square Park in the Gorilla Rep production of *King Lear*. This past month, he was back in his more familiar role as a performance artist at the One Dream in Tribeca. *Nothing Exists* was the most recent in a line of his concert/spectacles wherein he holds forth on the nature of reality as it relates to particle physics. Since he's taken the name of his fellow Pole, the 15th-century astronomer, it should come as no surprise that he would posit a revolutionary idea of his own.

His core belief is that since everything above the subatomic level is changing so rapidly, nothing comprised of those atoms can truly be said to "exist" in a real sense. Through a series of explosive rants, poems, and character monologues, he plays variations on this theme. In and of itself, his text is rather unpolished in style, but has a cleverness of its own, often raising a number of ticklish questions in the mind. "Every moment is Genesis. Every moment is Apocalypse," suggests possibilities of a creative chaos, universal pre-existence. He keeps you constantly thinking, even if only in disagreement with his thesis. (He never, for instance, deals with the possibility that this constant atomic change may itself be a form of existence.)

But, Copernicus is so much more than his text, and therein lie both the strengths and weakness of the show. He invokes the soul of a mad shaman, his guttural howls hitting a pitch of rage, torment, and ephemeral joy that many performers pretend to but seldom honestly achieve. Suggesting either a beefier Klaus Kinski or a leaner Charles Gray, his savage incantations about the "ghosts of energy" are suitably dissonant to reflect the kind of cosmic anarchy at the heart of his philosophy.

The drawback is that far too often he gets stuck on one note with no room to expand or develop. And, he is given to the darker equivalent of gilding the lily, as when he slams a cymbal with a drumstick while constantly repeating a single word like "blood" or "fire." In moments like these, Copernicus careens into the realm of self-parody and dismissable blather.

Director Christopher Sanderson (who shepherded the *Lear* production) clearly has a good eye for accentuating the strengths of his subject. His own lighting design was alternately hellish and ethereal. And his use of 16mm projections (on two different screens) of Copernicus more

sedately dissecting and deconstructing his theories had an effectively alienating effect in the Brechtian sense. It also offered a very interesting tonal contrast with the Holy Wildman seen on stage. In the filmed segments, Copernicus's rich humanity and capacity for irony were very much in evidence.

Ian Hill and **Sean Rockoff's** musical sound design was not just an accompanying soundtrack to the performance, but an inseparable part of the overall message and effect. An admixture of elements of ska, mazurka, and what can only be described as New Age's evil twin are the perfect aural embodiment of the author's vision.

While more than once the show lapsed into a groan-inducing excess of style, Copernicus has taken questions wrestled with by philosophers from Hume to Heisenberg and found a distinct, boldly original theatrical voice to express them, becoming as elemental a force as those he describes. While this show has closed, his five albums are available in many alternative record stores and are worth a listen.

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