

Zeitgeist shifts shapes with music

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STAFF WRITER

The arena stage in the Performing Arts Center usually houses students and actors-in-training, but Tuesday's performance by Zeitgeist gave the room a new aura of transformation.

SCSU faculty members Philippe Costaglioli and Scott Miller teamed up with St. Paul-based Zeitgeist to perform "Shape Shifting: Shades of Transformation" as part of the "Voicings Festival."

The arena stage created an intimate setting for a group of about 80 students, faculty and community members, who were positioned close to the performers on folding chairs.

The room was enhanced with a backdrop of white curtains that acted as a screen for a video display by Ron Gregg. The video interplayed with the performers, who were dressed in white. The projections made them part of the movie-like experience.

Haunting music by Zeitgeist created a base for Costaglioli's poetry.

The music and vocals transitioned between beauty and dissonance, at times creating competition between them.

A series of scenes containing

slow-downs and speed-ups of the projections and music provided the audience with different perspectives on the state of transformation.

Zeitgeist member Pat O'Keefe said that transformation exists in the performance at many levels.

"All of our instruments are miked and sent to the computer, and the computer transforms our sounds, resulting in an actual manipulation of our own sound," O'Keefe said. "Then Philippe's poetry also talks about change on many different levels: change in a very poetic and philosophical way, change throughout one's life and changes in viewpoints and ideas."

Formed in 1977, contemporary Zeitgeist is so-named for a German word meaning "spirit of the creative moment." O'Keefe thinks the group came up with a perfect name for their ensemble.

"We're a group that specializes in contemporary music, and contemporary music itself tends to reflect the time that it's written in," he said. "It's a great name for a group like us because we reflect the music and therefore the times we're in right now."

Collaboration, like the one with Costaglioli and Miller for "Shape Shifting," is the heart of Zeitgeist. The group is dedicated to new types and styles of music, said Anatoly

Larkin, pianist for Zeitgeist.

"It's a pleasure for us to work here (at SCSU) because we are all about commissioning new works from composers, collaborating with musicians and doing improvisations like you heard in the piece tonight," Larkin said.

For film studies professor Philippe Costaglioli, poetry is not just something he performs, it is the way he lives.

"I think the show does a good job of contrasting the emotions of grace and sorrow," said Costaglioli. "By associating contrasting words and expressions, it creates a little mystery, and to me that's the experience of poetry."

"Voicings" is the brainchild of mass communications professor Mark Eden. Although he has seen "Shape Shifting" live four times, he remains impressed with the freshness of Costaglioli's poetry and the subtle and not-so-subtle changes in the music.

Eden was pleased with the first "Voicings" performance and promised more good things to come.

"This is just one small slice of a very large pie; we're hoping 'Voicings' becomes an annual event," Eden said. "We wanted to show the range and scope of how information is disseminated out and how we take it in and synthesize it. We wanted to show that through the arts and other scholarly venues."

"Voicings" picks up again today at 1 p.m. in the Atwood Theater with "Let's Talk Again: Communication Program for Stroke Survivors." World-renowned artist Chris Mann will perform the American premier of "dunno how to get there but wouldn't start from here" tonight at 7:30 p.m. on the arena stage. Despite a mistake in the "Voicings" program, all events are free and open to the public.

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