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Reza Abdo (PAJ Books: Art + Performance)



Synopsis

"In ancient cultures, they didn't practice theory in their dances; they wanted to arrive at a state of trance, and I think that's an appropriate approach for the arts: to create a work that is entrancing." -- Reza Abdoh

Incorporating interviews, critical essays, reviews, and the complete text of the play *The Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice*, Reza Abdoh is a comprehensive introduction to this influential and controversial theater artist. By the time he died of AIDS in the spring of 1995 at age 32, Reza Abdoh had written, assembled, and directed well over a dozen works for the stage. In this first complete account of his career, Abdoh emerges as an internationally acclaimed artist who was influenced by a wide range of cultures and sources. Yet he is also distinctly American: a visionary who drew heavily on popular culture to expose sexual, racial, and media obsessions in American society.

Despite this influence, Abdoh's works are not typical of American theater, according to theater critic Daniel Mufson, because they vehemently reject sentimentality and happy endings. Abdoh was born in Iran, raised in England, and lived and worked in New York and Los Angeles. He was the recipient of a CalArts/Alpert Theater award in 1995 and a posthumous "Bessie," the Choreographer and Creator Award for Sustained Achievement. Several of his plays toured extensively in Europe. Aside from directing his own plays, Abdoh worked in other genres and media, ranging from a staging of Verdi's *Simon Boccanegre* to the making of a feature-length film, *The Blind Owl*. "The aesthetic shock of encountering Abdoh's turbulent work sent me reeling back to relive the shock of discovering the radical new art of the 60's, which changed my life." -- Richard Foreman

"Abdoh filled his works with tension: tension born of moral and formal contradictions; tension born of tone oscillating wildly from frenzy to calm; tension born of the negotiation between poetic and profane, traditional and modern, normal and abnormal... One of the surprising aspects of Abdoh's work was that it was able to render wretchedness shocking to a society that ordinarily considers itself numbed to depiction of its own dejectedness." -- Daniel Mufson, from the Introduction

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Customer Reviews

These latest entries in the recent series from the editors of *Performing Arts Journal* shed light on two very different practitioners of avant-garde theater. Foreman is in some ways the elder statesman of nonnarrative experimental theater, having produced his own plays continually for 30 years. While he often cites Brecht and Gertrude Stein as primary influences, his highly entertaining plays have their own unique form and relate his own philosophical and psychological probings acted out on the stage. Also a complete theater artist who wrote, directed, and designed his plays, Abdoh who died of AIDS in 1995 at age 32Aworked for fewer than ten years in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He received much attention for his angry, political work, which confronted such issues as race, class, and AIDS head on, but no other permanent record of his career exists. Rabkin, a Rutgers theater arts professor, and Mufson, a writer specializing in the theater, bring these disparate careers into focus through a wide variety of writings. After introductory essays (Rabkin's is particularly insightful), the editors present a wide selection of interviews, reviews, and analytic essays as well as a section of original texts (playscripts and/or theoretical writings) by the artists themselves. Although the bulk of the writing here has been previously published, the books gather scattered information and cohere to provide overviews that will be useful to experts and novices alike. Recommended for all academic libraries supporting any sort of theater or performance programs. ADouglas McClemont, New York Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"A welcome -- and overdue -- context for understanding Abdoh's art, placing him on a continuum from Brecht to Artaud to Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theatre. Along the way, Abdoh's themes of decay, death, abuse of power, and the cannibalistic proclivities of contemporary culture receive provocative amplification in the retelling... This collection serves well as both a requiem for what we've lost in his passing and a reminder of what passionately experimental theater artists can accomplish." -- Kerry Reid, *East Bay Express*

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