



PERCEPTION AND PARADOX Images of Charles Dodgson overlook the dazzling spectacle of George Coates' *Right Mind is Nowhere*, while a hovering weather balloon serves as a weird projection screen.

Created out of the Oct. 17 earthquake-inspired destruction of previous show *Right Mind* and San Francisco's Geary Theater, *Right Mind is Nowhere* is a sense-barraging Wonderland that is truly nothing like anything seen here before.

Writer/director Coates resists standard conflict-resolution dramatic forms in favor of anarchic extravagance. This production questions and explores perception and paradox, confusion and contradiction. One must experience the show to understand what Coates means when he talks about "the dynamic charge of the impossible and the inevitable" and "the dramatic tension of certainty versus probability."

Right Mind is Nowhere spends a good deal of time discussing order and disorder, though the show is only ordered aesthetically; the near-random appearance of topics and characters evokes a dreamlike quality that renders attempts to "follow" the plot in a normal sense hopeless.

The production features the members of the Child Prodigy Furtherment Society, six girls who give an intricate "lecture presentation" about the catastrophe of *Right Mind*. Accompanying the girls are two singers who arrive for what they believe is an audition for a new show and a bandaged understudy purportedly discovered in the rubble of the Geary Theater. The understudy remembers all the lines from *Right Mind* "but not in the right order."

Like the San Francisco production, *Right Mind is Nowhere* concerns the life and works of Charles Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll. Every aspect of Dodgson's "multiple

personality"—storyteller, photographer, logician, child genius and teacher—is represented, mainly through the understudy (Robert Keefe).

The visuals are the most memorable aspect: a Cheshire Cat-like eye-and-lips monster projected on a weather balloon; the backgrounds of stars and chessboards; the shimmering "logic prison"—projected on the stage, ceiling and walls. The envelope of intangible shapes effectively brings in the audience, helping to make the production far more involving than a typical play.

Singers Marlynn Smith and Vince Ebo perform much of the time, mastering jazz, opera and pop styles along the way. Composer Marc Ream's score determines the show's tempo, which rises and falls with the music.

When everything comes together the result is nothing short of breathtaking. At one point a spotlight Smith sings while Ebo, also singing, spins in a concentric-circle gyroscope tangled in a web of projected shapes; in the foreground one girl sings counterpoint and two others perform gymnastics. A projected portrait of Dodgson oversees the proceedings.

There is more going on than mere special effect; *Right Mind is Nowhere* is filled with clever, almost philosophic barbs of muse and wit, most courtesy of the six girls, who speak in puns and looking-glass logic ("Words mean anything I want them to mean") that provokes thought and amusement.

As befitting a professional Bay Area theater company, the performances are nothing short of tremendous. Smith, Ebo and Keefe—

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who spends much of the show upside down—are outstanding in roles that call for incredible talent and diversity, but the six precocious prodigies—ages 9 to 13—are the real stars, coping with the who's-in-charge role reversals with ease and even creating clever dialogue out of Tuesday night's dress-rehearsal amplification problems.

Coates' shows have been criticized for being, at the core, "just empty pretty pictures," and the assessment is a valid one—most of the playful dialogue provides only short-term psychic entertainment, and I doubt if audience members will walk out of Laxson humming the show's songs. What is remembered is the overall sensation—and the dazzling visuals.

And that is worth the price of admission. Chico will not see the likes of this production for some time; we should take advantage of the opportunity.

Right Mind is Nowhere runs every night through Saturday at 8:15 in Chico State's Laxson Auditorium.

—MATTHEW BUDMAN

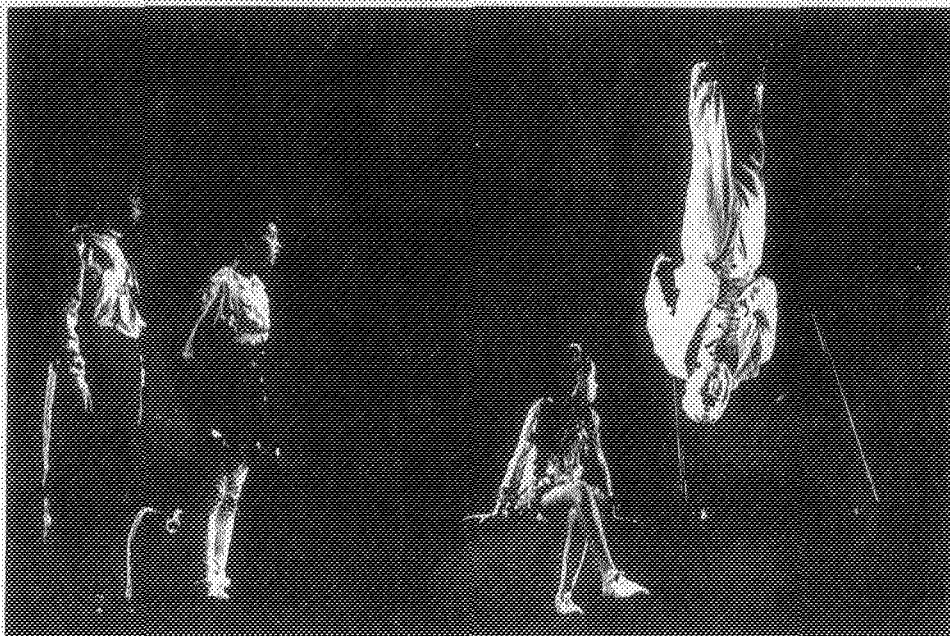
theater review

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Seismic Wonderland

'*Right Mind is Nowhere*'
Laxson Auditorium, CSUC

Call it hyperdrama. George Coates' *Right Mind is Nowhere*—an aural, visual and psychic spectacle—defies ordinary description and analysis.



THE IMPOSSIBLE AND THE INEVITABLE Three members of the Child Prodigy Furtherment Society watch the Understudy (Robert Keefe), suspended by his heels, in a scene from *Right Mind is Nowhere*.

PHOTOS/MARK THAMMAN