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'Twilight' Reflects on L.A. Riots

By PHILIP MCFEE
Staff Writer

After the verdict in the Rodney King trial was read in April 1992, the United States was challenged to rethink its definition of justice.

Based on the country's situation in the world, it seems as if the times aren't always a-changin'.

"Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992" is the latest production by the Street Signs Center for Literature and Performance — a locally based theater group that addresses cultural and political issues in its performances.

The show was originally a performance piece by Anna Deavere Smith composed entirely of transcripts from interviews conducted with victims of the Los Angeles riots that followed the acquittal of four of the policemen who attacked King.

Deavere Smith's work was originally a solo show composed of numerous viewpoints from many ethnic groups and social classes. It was an idea destined to be adapted for an ensemble cast.

Fortunately, Derek Goldman, Street Signs artistic director and director of "Twilight," was up to the task. His artful transition of the work preserved — if not enhanced — the impact of the material.

He also has been behind the adaptations of such works as James Joyce's "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" and Henry James' "The Turn of the Screw" for the Street Signs stage.

For the duration of "Twilight," the talented performers hold the audience's focus.

It isn't the graphic subject matter that makes the piece such a success — the engrossing portrayals of the diverse cast of characters are the true driving force. From attackers to victims, the actors weep and rant as Los Angeles' outraged inhabitants.

The tales told are of hate and revenge — but also of acceptance. The lessons they teach about racial intolerance are not set in the past. In times of racial prejudice in domestic and international affairs, the often-shocking monologues shed light on what having an "enemy" really means.

It's impossible to isolate particular performances because the quality of all the segments was high, with Goldman taking advantage of a group's ability to weave converging storylines.

The cast also expertly portrays the hardships of all ethnic groups — the 58 left dead and 2,000-plus injured in the 1992 riots were just the beginning of the damage.

And what about that ever-difficult concept of justice? That's the best part of "Twilight" — it gives all the points of the struggle but leaves the solution open.

There's something to be said for a self-taught lesson, after all.

Some timing problems exist, but the transitions are difficult — involving not only movement, but music and video (albeit the heavy-handed use of Ice T's "Cop Killer").

"Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992" runs at 8 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday in Swain Hall. Performances Saturday and Sunday also run at 2 p.m. Admission is \$7 for students and \$14 for night shows and \$12 for matinees for non-students.

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1:30-4:00-7:00-9:30

DAREDEVIL [R] [R]
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