

TGIF

Iona's 'Dominion' urges empathy with animals in our orbit

By Lynn Cook, Special to the Star-Advertiser

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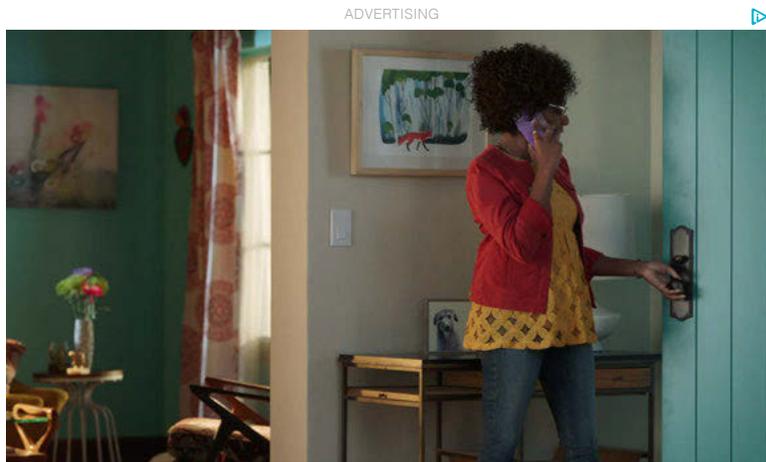
MARIE HOBRO / SPECIAL TO THE STAR-ADVERTISER

Moses Goods gets into character as the Raven, a shadow figure in Iona Contemporary Dance Theatre's "Domini" takes its cue from the mythological roots of the Pacific Northwest Coast Tlingit tribe. Goods — a triple-threat actor — is appearing for the first time in a nonspeaking role on stage.

Moses Goods is known both for his dramatic presence and his voice — one that resonates across many stages, in Hawaii and beyond, in classrooms and even on local television commercials (he’s the man speaking to a bobble-head doll on the dashboard of his car in those DTRIC Insurance commercials).

This weekend the Hawaii-based actor will express himself silently, in character as the Raven in Iona Contemporary Dance Theatre’s original production of “Dominion.”

It will be his first nonspeaking part in a stage production — but Goods said the fit is perfect. The story of the Raven is a myth from the Pacific Northwest Coast Tlingit tribe about animals who preceded humans on Earth.



“For me,” he says, “it is an opportunity to explore different emotions with other dancers — very different from the structure of hula or the storytelling theater I have done before.” He is a shadow figure for most of the show, whose “magnificence” is realized only in the finale.

“DOMINION”

Presented by Iona Contemporary Dance Theatre

>> **Where:** Hawaii Theatre

>> **When:** 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday

>> **Cost:** \$30-\$75

>> **Info:** 528-0506, hawaiitheatre.com

Goods drew from his own cultural background to respond to this challenge, he said. His mother is Native Hawaiian, from Hana, Maui; his father is black. His parents met in New Mexico when his mother was serving in the Job Corps and his dad was stationed with the military.

Goods was born in Washington, D.C., but grew up in Hawaii, where his parents raised their five children. He attended the University of Hawaii-Manoa, where he studied acting and theater.

Often seen on stage in productions with Hawaiian themes, as well as in plays with European roots, Goods is also a dancer for Mapuana de Silva's Halau Mohala 'Ilima.

As he tells it, "A girl in high school led me to drama class. She was soon gone, but I loved the class and stayed. When I had to choose a major in college I looked at drama. My dad said, 'Do it.'"

Goods smiled as he said, "No one mentioned that there is a 95 percent unemployment rate for actors." He's responded by diversifying his talents. Since graduation in 1999, he has become a highly respected professional storyteller and writer for the stage, as well as an award-winning actor, performing his own original work in Hawaii, Europe, the U.S. mainland, Canada and several Pacific islands.

Funny, serious, with a deep voice often compared to that of Alex Haley, he says he loves "presenting the story."

THE CREATOR of "Dominion," Cheryl Flaharty, Iona's artistic director, said the production is unlike anything the company has previously produced.

The work, combining modern dance, extravagant costuming, electronic backdrops and music, echoes her concern over humans' of animals.

Some parts of "Dominion" also address the planet's food industry, including developments such as genetic engineering and the touting of "miracle foods."

It may sound too heavy to be entertaining or ethereal, but in fact the dancers seem to float through the production's 20-foot-tall LED panels — towers actually, forming a backdrop for projected images of animals.

As with other Iona productions, "Dominion" addresses profound issues and rewards empathy, while also delighting audiences with rich, colorful costuming, gorgeous, agile movement and playful staging.

Not all of the themes are somber. The production includes eight mechanical poodles, who take "dominion" over their owners.

"My dancers are totally involved and committed to the message of the story," Flaharty noted. "Many are vegetarian."

Flaharty spent two years researching the material for "Dominion," she said. The dancers' took their responsibilities equally as seriously, rehearsing with Flaharty's cat toys, for example, to help them prep for mastering the art of

“animal action.”

AS PORTRAYED by Iona’s 23 highly trained, talented and amazingly agile dancers, many elements in the show are dramatic.

Dancer Malia Yamamoto is the essence of life, imprisoned in a golden cage. Dancers surround her.

Another dancer is used as an altar for candles. The train of a red dress signifies the bloodshed of elephants.

These make strong statements.

Ultimately, Flaherty said, she hopes the take-away of the story will be that there is a better future, if people care and are committed to making changes.

“I love stories, myths, allegories and anything ancient,” she said; but she is contemporary in her approach to creating and staging Iona productions.

“And I love to collaborate with musicians, filmmakers, other dancers — whatever makes it work for all of us!”

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