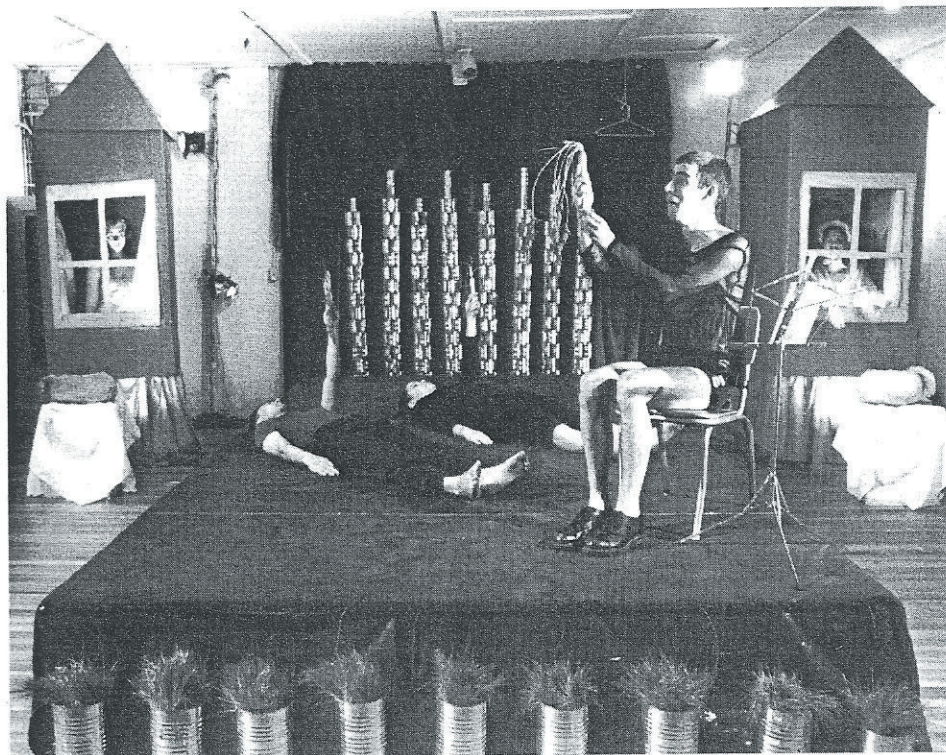


Scott Heron

The Scott Heron Show



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Ten years into the AIDS epidemic, we are still collectively trying to develop an emotional/mental construct for responding to the scourge. One approach is to explore the meaning of AIDS through making art. Now a *New Yorker*, Scott Heron recently returned to Austin where his performing career began to participate in Deborah Hay's latest workshop. While here, he put together his first full-evening work *The Scott Heron Show*, portraying a progression of personal reactions to AIDS through symbol-laden vignettes.

In opening, Heron kept repeating the phrase, "He was simple in his ways." He and two cohorts performed a formally structured dance, with pivots, spins, marching and falls, characterizing the obliviousness of the world at large. In *Death Fart Fuck* Heron, ludicrously attired in dorky pants, jerked and propelled to the mellifluous farts of Ellen Fullman's electronic score. We are corporeal beings, gas bags if you will, regardless of our stance on AIDS. Heron was deliberately pathetic, a state more likely to evoke embarrassment than sympathy, subtly provoking

our negative tendencies to pretend not to see the suffering around us.

In her solo, Brett Vapnek projected wholesomeness in a mix of cheerleader and MTV, but evoked the inevitable loss of innocence and the pervasiveness of naive sexuality. Namsik Kim's tentativeness, in changing directions of his walk, signified widespread hesitation to acknowledge AIDS. As "Ball Moss," a phallic symbol of AIDS, Beverly Bajema was swathed entirely in black net decorated with long tassels of moss resembling fur. Entering from the rear, she slowly moved through the audience, quixotically mixing sinister and benign. As she moved onto the raised platform, revealing one shoe of red roses, Heron's arm snaked into view from behind the stage. He then got under her robe, in a macabre depiction of encounters with disease and death. In parallel solos throughout the evening, Liz Gans as "Flesh" and Manu Bird as "Spirit" enacted stylized mini-dramas showing that life goes on regardless.

Attired in a frumpy gown contrasting starkly with his unfemale form, Heron lip-

synched with grotesquely exaggerated expressions to a torch song about love being the key to survival, poignantly attesting to the unsuppressible human desire to connect with others. He then told stories, including one about a friend with AIDS who nailed six mice to the floor and called everyone he knew to tell how surprised he was that mice take so long to die.

In this meticulously constructed show, every detail was loaded: the glittering monoliths of soda cans that got knocked down symbolized the toppling of icons; grass growing out of tin cans signified hope; tide boxes suspended behind Heron as he juggled fire in the finale were a metaphor for the superficiality of mainstream culture and its obsession with perfection of surface. *The Scott Heron Show* brought mortality into high relief. AIDS is a horror that heightens the meaning of life and death for the young. Long and spindly, with a hollow-cheeked, haunting mien, Heron uncannily reminded one of Mexican images of skeletons cavorting in the afterlife. Riveting and tragicomic, he consumed existence in huge gulps and distilled a wisdom of sorts, believing that love and courage will somehow transcend the decimation.

—Sarah Wimer

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Sarah Wimer writes about performing and visual arts.