

## Disarming Nudity Warnings: Nudes in Review



When preparing to announce each new performing arts season, part of my job is to write about the upcoming shows and add warnings about adult content or any atmospheric irritations potential audience members might need to know about: violence, nudity, loudness, strobe lights, and fog. But it was the nudity warnings that required the most careful wording last season. It may have seemed simple but I have been trying to be transparent, writing cautionary notes as creatively suggestive, with their tone and intentions matching the ultimate exposure in the performances.

My insistence in avoiding the use of generic nudity labels started with the John Jasperse Company's Walker-commissioned piece *Truth, Revised Histories, Wishful Thinking, and Flat Out Lies* in May of 2010, when I wanted the audience to see beyond the nakedness to the themes enumerated in the show's title. The warning—

(Note: Performance contains nudity and sleight of hand tricks)

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—also hints at a section of the performance when the choreographer does a magic act poorly, further emphasizing what the real actions are as opposed to the intended ones.

Later in 2010, Minneapolis-based interdisciplinary choreographic collective SuperGroup performed an innocent although cheeky (in more ways than one) dance work in that year's Choreographers' Evening curated by Susana di Palma. Since Choreographers' Evening is a group show of short pieces, I didn't want to reveal who was going to be naked and ruin the surprise, and yet I didn't want audiences anticipating something in-your-face-naked and taint the other works which were so different. SuperGroup's piece *Spring Dance Unrated* was inspired by pseudo-classical Isadora Duncan style movements, so the lightness of the choreography needed to be reflected in the spirit of the warning. The language used—

**(Note: Performance contains joyous nudity)**

—was playful and unassuming—and “joyous” became the baseline office reference for all nudity for years after. I was encouraged by this level of attention to detail and the effect it can have on positioning expectations and dissolving any loaded references.



Young Jean Lee, *Untitled Feminist Show*, 2012

The ability to boldly underscore the obvious was fun in Young Jean Lee's Theater Company's *Untitled Feminist Show*. The publicity photos never hid the fact that the



performers would be naked the entire time so the warning was intentionally redundant–

**(Note: performance contains [a lot of] nudity)**

–in order to get to the point of what makes gender and where is humanity in the flesh.

The 2012-13 season opened in September with another Walker commission, Miguel Gutierrez and the Powerful People's *And lose the name of action*, named after the Shakespearean line in *Hamlet*. Last summer as we were putting out publicity materials in advance of the performances, the show was still in development and nudity was being explored but was far from confirmed. The research and themes of the piece evoked paranormal phenomena and neuroscience, so having a non-committal note–

**(Warning: Some potential nudity)**

–worked with the possibility that the nude parts could be cut out of the final production while also playing into the mind games of the superstitious and hallucinatory aspects of the choreography. I covered my bases by having the warning listed and still was able to stay true to the piece.



The BodyCartography Project, *Super Nature*. Photo: Gene Pittman

October's premiere of BodyCartography Project's *Super Nature* had plenty of nudity but without any sexual references. The piece explored the theme of the uncivilized

versus the socialized, so to add to the atmosphere I noted this–

**(Warning: Some bodies appear in their natural state)**

–as part of the *National Geographic*-ness of the work.

During Out There, Rude Mechs’ *The Method Gun* was a theatrical adventure and so having a charged message–

**(Warning: Full frontal nudity)**

–explaining the naked parts was encouraging, emphasizing the exhilarating ride the play was.

The final exposure of the season was more haphazard in Cecilia Bengolea, François Chaignaud, Marlene Monteiro Freitas, and Trajal Harrell’s two-hour hot mess of a show, *(M)imosa/Twenty Looks or Paris is Burning at the Judson Church (M)*. Also part of Out There, this performance was more of a series of overlapping solos and costume changes, part song-and-dance marathon within a character-based play. The waiting between numbers was as important as the numbers themselves. As such the language–

**(Warning: Costume malfunctions. Expect nudity)**

–highlighted the anticipation as much as the events.

I am considering adding this newly developed skill to my resume. The innuendos and reveals in each felt like mini works of art. If you have an idea of what to name this talent, let me know. Curator of expectations in adult content?

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