



Cabaret show Strips away gender stereotypes

By Cherylynn Tsushima

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Kimberly Dark is unconventional, to say the least.

"I tell stories about my life in order to illuminate the stories which form our culture-the stories by which we organize ourselves, often without really knowing it," Dark wrote on her Web site. She identifies herself as an artistic activist, but more than that she is a performer who allows the audience to think outside the box of cultural constructions.

On March 26, Dark performed "Stripped and Teased: Scandalous Stories with Subversive Subplots," sponsored by the Office of Student Activities and the Campus Center, in the Cabaret.

Dark's spoken-word performance was a mixture of poetry and storytelling interwoven with audience interaction. Dark told stories about people in society that are often marginalized and oppressed, including women and the homosexual community.

In sharing her stories, Dark hopes to inspire positive change in society.

"Rather than forcing change, we inspire change. That is the power of artistic activism," Dark wrote on the site.

Throughout the performance, she would ask the audience questions and get some of their thoughts. Dark brought a pair of seven-inch "stripper shoes" and asked for a volunteer to try on the high-heeled behemoths. Senior marketing communication major Jay MacFadgen finally offered to put on the shoes.

"Do you feel sexy?" she asked.

"I don't," MacFadgen replied.

Dark explained how the shoes created a strange combination of power and vulnerability. The height gives the wearer a sense of power, yet the shoes are extremely hard to walk in.

Caitlin Simmons, a freshman communication sciences and disorders major, heard about Dark's performance from her boyfriend and decided that it sounded interesting and worthwhile.

One story that Simmons enjoyed was about the similarities between lower income women that work as waitresses in greasy spoons and those that work as strippers in clubs across America.

"I really liked how Kimberly gave two stories about lower class women who are struggling to get a job, but she made it clear prior to her story that any women could relate in some way," Simmons said.

Dark also commented on the need to try to understand the perspectives of other people.

"I don't believe in reality, I believe in standpoint objective reality," Dark said.

Dark discussed some of the harmful socializations that are part of society's collective beliefs about men and women.

"She talked about how gender cannot be put into 'two neat boxes,'" Simmons said. "She emphasized that the need to point out differences creates more harm than good and ultimately leads people to believe in gender roles."

In another story, Dark spoke about our need to be liked.

"How much effort goes into being liked?" Dark asked the audience.

She explained the danger of trying so hard to be liked that one loses sight of who they truly are.

Dark said she doesn't try to be accepted; rather, she offers who she is and allows the people she comes in contact with to either take it or leave it.

"I'm offering what's real about my experience even if it's painful," Dark said.

Though Simmons did not necessarily agree with everything that Dark said, she still took a lot away from the show.

"I do know that she was trying to prove a point for women to express who they are rather than repress themselves, and I respect what she said overall," she said.

In one of her final poems, Dark passionately told the audience to accept who they are.

Her poem, about women whose poor sense of body image makes them feel the need to change their appearance as well as the appearance of those around them, is honest and attentive.

"Somehow she thinks she can carve away the outer layer and find herself," Dark said.

"Stop waiting, darling, and live your life now."

kimberlydark.com