



9/28/2015 0 Comments

 [RSS Feed](#)



This month, a new kind of cacophony echoed over the orchard hillside of the Lucas Artists Residency Program (LAP). Throughout the day and into the night, from the dancer's studio at the top of the hill came bellowing shouts, grunts, and cries. At artist



roll around in the slime of human experience of the monstrous and the heroic. Informed by two classic works of literature, the Old English poem *Beowulf* and John Gardner's novel *Grendel*, a retelling of that classic tale from the perspective of the monster of that name, they are creating a new theatrical experience built through a challenging exploration of human experience. Using fragments of these texts almost as incantations and shaping a ritual ordeal, day after day in their studios they have been deriving heroism and monstrosity from first principles. Like much of creation, it's a noisy process and riveting to watch.

We Players is a site-specific theatre company based in the Bay Area that uses classic literature to create stunning experiences in special places. Their most recent large production animated the ruins of the Sutro Baths in San Francisco for an enthralling production of *Ondine* in which the audience followed the progress of the play across the wind-swept ruins. We Players' work is known internationally--they recently were celebrated by Backstage as one of seven companies producing groundbreaking immersive theatre worldwide.

## **“What is a monster?”**

Intelligent, keenly aware, visibly working even while eating and playing, Ava and Natty put in a daily ten hours, or they make up the hours the next day—Ava's rule. After the artists clean up after dinner together in the LAP Commons kitchen, these two set off up the hill again and studio 60 is lit up like a crucible.

At Montalvo, the We Players are involved in what is, for their work, a significant experiment. Their hallmark work is site-integrated theatre. They work mostly with Shakespeare, and mostly in dramatic outdoor environments, with huge casts and crews. Ava describes the genesis of the experiment this way: “A couple years ago I started wondering what it would be like for the company, and for me artistically, to balance the scales with intense shows that are still inspired by epics and classics but that are much smaller-scale in nature. What would that allow me? This idea of being able to go deep into a text and go deep with one or two other collaborators, rather than managing the sheer scale of our large-scale work.



themes. *King Fool's* themes were around death and dying. This year it's around heroism and monstrosity—and we're finding out also about shame and kindness. The residency at Montalvo was profound and crucial for giving us the space to build something from scratch.”

HEROMONSTER, the product of this exploration, will be premiered in October 2015 at the Fort Mason Chapel, with an original score by award-winning composer Charlie Gurke. *We Players* describes the work as “a feast of poetry, mythology, and interactive storytelling,” and it is that. Artists and staff at Montalvo got the chance to preview the work in progress last week. It is still resonating, if not on the hill, then in the pit of my stomach.

Being witness to the arduous process of creating this work, which is clearly an endurance test, a personal ordeal, an unflinching commitment to shoveling up the deepest soil of our humanness, has been a reminder of the inner role that performance can play. Two thousand years ago, Ava Roy would have been the Delphic Oracle. In a world lacking that career path, she has created a fitting role for herself. Ostensibly, the *We Players* creates theatre. I asked Ava one night at artist dinner at the picnic table, what she is trying to accomplish with this work. She was quick to respond: “To help people feel more awake and more alive.”

**ARTICLE BY LORI WOOD**

0 Comments

**Leave a Reply.**