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Dear colleagues,

It is with pleasure that I am writing this review of Marc Arthur's production of *Memories of a Supernatural AIDS Crisis*. I thoroughly enjoyed witnessing the performance in June 2024, and I had both seen earlier versions of related material, and published some of Marc's writing and performance photos of the opera-version of the story (About Place: Practices of Hope). So given this background and familiarity with Marc's oeuvre and approach, I was so excited to see this project come together so beautifully on a fully produced stage.

The show began in delight: the house was packed. The scene offered was a deliciously queer and fun-loving audience, indeed. That night, this theater was the place to be, to be seen, and to enjoy. The vibe was on: intimate and expansive, gorgeous and deep. The show played on each aspect of this queer historical performance experience, and managed to meld us, the audience, into an affective circle of co-creation: we were witnesses of time travel *and* ballroom and club aesthetics, we were in a performance art liveness *and* in the registers of musical theatre – and we were, again and again, in Detroit.

Three performers took the stage, each entering in deep fabulousity. It's the year 2124. The personae are Pandrion, a Black trans cyborg full of femme longing (Pink Flowers, in an inspired and magnetic casting); Xylophylactis, a Hamlet-like vampire and singer who arrived in the 1980s from Sault Ste. Marie (Joe Smentowski, a Wayne State acting student); and the Narrator, a gorgeous Afrofuturist goddess witch of Detroit (Yolanda Jack, an assured and powerful presence on stage). The three act out their scenes under three moons: giant disco balls that transform the black box theatre into neon silver flashes, with barre and bright lights setting club expectations in the stark and protective darkness.

The Narrator offers us the storyline: it's the contaminated future, Detroit is the last city of earth, and in the annual ritual we are about to witness, club beats help keep viruses at bay, DJ's are the new doctors, and the population renews itself in The Forgetting.

Forgetting allows these trans-humans to live again, to renew themselves, but Xylophylactis can't forget, and carries the traumas of the past.

As the play unfolds, we travel backward and forward in time, encounter the city's traumatic past, segregation and revolutionary riots, AIDS and biopharmaca mutations, pollution and abandonment, and throughout, flowers and moments of beauty and connection.

Again and again, the play grounds itself in familiar space – “I walk through the Packard Plant on an icy night,” it’s the “Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church,” – and then knits a mélange of survivance out of funk, disinfectant, and neon. Everybody is searching for beauty – and we, the audience, find it in tableaux of tenderness, fragments of song, the constellations of silver mirrorballs, moon-scapes and gorgeous fashion. Dance phrases skip across the stage, and Greek chorus-like recitation sways with the poetic fragments of anguished lover dialogue as gorgeousness holds death at bay. Literally: as the city mutates through time, the virus now offers those infected an immune system that never ages, and freedom from both gender and decay.

In Arthur’s prose, the body of the city and the body of its trans-human cyborgian lovers and goddesses transpose and shift, and the choreography of the three actors holds traces of this shapeshifting. Poses switch and are held, are discarded and attained, with exercises at the barre and diva-esque drag performance segments when the Mother of the House of Revolutionary Love puts on high wattage and we, the whole audience, offer our obeisance in cat calls and whoops.

Memories of a Supernatural AIDS Crisis is both ritual and club, exorcism and lyric love story, horror and dance. The three performers carried a heavy and deeply poetic script, full of nuance and reversals, and moved through a celestial rite of renewal.

The performance is deeply grounded in Detroit and its racialized and queer history – but I hope to see this performance travel beyond the city, and for others to see this solarpunk/viruspunk production of survivance and transcendence in embodied love.

My sense is that Marc Arthur works as an auteur, with a strong and driving vision, full of experimental verve and visionary passion – and this makes his work extraordinary. It can be hard to find coherent funding for this kind of experimentalism, but I hope that festivals will recognize and reward the rich excitement of the show.

Warmly,
Petra