

The Oregonian

The poetic logic of 'No Strangers'

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Bob Hicks, The Oregonian

Susan Banyas has been doing performance art around Portland for longer than people have been calling it "performance art," although the sort of thing she does has little to do with the headline-screaming, chocolate-smearing gender politics that drove performance art's political enemies nuts in the 1990s.

Still, the term fits. Her performances are highly personal, they rely more on poetic than narrative logic, and they cross a lot of disciplines. They're about dance, certainly, as her days with SO&SO&SO&SO attest. They're highly visual. Storytelling is part of the mix, and so is music.

All of which is to say that whenever Banyas unveils a new project, it's bound to be idiosyncratic and interesting.

Certainly "No Strangers Here Today," which runs this weekend at the Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center, holds a lot of promise. Banyas has reached back to the memory of her great-great-grandmother, Elizabeth Edwards, a Quaker whose Civil War diary suggests (albeit in cryptic code) that she was active in the Underground Railroad. Banyas uses this family history as a jumping-off point for a piece about political engagement.

She also has excellent collaborators, including David Ornette Cherry, the Los Angeles world jazz musician who wrote and performs the music (the son of trumpeter Don Cherry, he got his middle name in honor of his father's friend and collaborator, Ornette Coleman); movement director Gregg Bielemeier; and vocal director Gwynne Allyn Warner.

8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 4 and 7 p.m. Sunday. Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center, 5340 N. Interstate Ave.; \$10-\$20, 503-239-7107.