

tristebien Engaging Despite Incoherent Plot

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Last weekend in Fisher Hall, senior Antonia Alvarez presented her hourlong Honors Interdisciplinary Performance Project, *tristebien*, to the delight of much of her audience.

Roughly meaning "Good Sadness," the title of the piece captured the essence of the performance, which consisted of spoken and recorded poetry, live instrumental music and choreographed movement pieces, all of which, by themselves, intended to evoke a mood of quiet melancholy.

This set included a blank, white wall, above which hung a pane of glass, against which water pattered throughout the performance. The lighting was dim and as the piece opened, Alvarez lay at center stage on a collection of pillows, where she remained for nearly the whole piece.

Alvarez suddenly awakened from a slumber and gasped for air. This went on for so long that the audience might have wondered whether Alvarez was just performing or having an asthmatic attack. The uncertainty added to the ambiance of the work as she eventually caught her breath and began to read selections of poetry, in a soft monotone out of a book, which hung from a rope around her neck.

The poetry was excerpted from such works as *Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen* and *27 Wagons Full of Cotton* by Tennessee Williams, *Loose Women*, by Sandra Cisneros and *Bone Black* by bell hooks. The slow, almost hypnotic manner with which Alvarez read provoked a feeling of calm sleepiness and quiet contemplation.

Interspersed between bouts of reading were periods of silence where only the pattering of rain was heard. At other times, the audience heard a recorded dialogue of a male and a female whispering quietly to one another, adding to the sensation of tranquility, and paralleling Alvarez, who remained alone.

At other times, performers entered the space playing mordant tunes on flute and guitar. With ropes around their arms or legs, they hauled small wooden platforms carrying anything from sliced potatoes, to the performer's stone glass bottles of cow's blood behind them. They moved and interacted within the space in a disturbingly torpid and deliberate way.

These elements of the performance seemed never to resolve themselves into a coherent plot structure, and their darkly surreal quality created the mood of being inside a dream. Overall, the piece conjured a feeling of being hypnotized into a quiet hallucination.

Alvarez stated in the performance's program that *tristebien* is "A series of numbers that has no end, no beginning... a work in progress... a beginning of an understanding." She continued to say, presumably to the audience, "sit back. listen to the words, the rain, the breath, the silence."

Later, she emphasized the performance's slack of beginning and ending, and voiced that the goal of the piece was simply to capture or to "create a moment" for her audience to experience and ponder.