

THEATRE

Puppetry with a twist

Basil Twist's 'Araneidae Show' comes to the Noh Space

by Richard Dodds

Basil Twist was in a wetsuit the last time he took a bow in San Francisco. Twist was the creator and one of five puppeteers who manipulated various everyday objects through a 100-gallon tank of water to create an abstract phantasmagoria in *Symphonie Fantastique*. But Twist will be traveling light, solo, and dry when he returns to his hometown for a four-performance run at the Noh Space on Dec. 6.

"In some ways, it's a much more traditional puppet show," Twist said of *The Araneidae Show*. "There are figurative puppets in it, and it's on a puppet stage. But it's still different from most puppet shows you've ever seen."

That shouldn't be surprising, since Twist has been heralded for nearly a decade for his adventurous reimagining of puppetry. *The Araneidae Show*, in fact, became his breakthrough production when he first performed it in 1993.

"It was quite well-regarded in the puppetry world," Twist said. "It was a big thing for me, and I thought it couldn't get any better than that. But then came *Symphonie Fantastique*, which went beyond the puppetry world to a lot of other kinds of audiences."

But after *Symphonie Fantastique* in 1999 and the recent *Petrushka* at Lincoln Center that required nine puppeteers, Twist wanted to reconnect to his simpler, earlier days. "Those were very satisfying experiences, but very different from what I used to do," he said. "I just got thirsty for doing that again."



Puppet master Twist with creations: 'I sort of have this thing for spiders.'

Puppets twist & shout
Basil Twist's 'Araneidae'
bows at the Noh Space.
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The Araneidae Show takes its name from the kind of spider that weaves circular webs. "I sort of have this thing for spiders," Twist said. "There are spiders throughout the show."

There are also, according to the press release, "an extravaganza of showgirls, lonely streets, cats, deconstructing theaters, sex, despair, magic, metamorphosis, and the fragile web of illusion sometimes called reality."

"It's very hard to describe this show," Twist said, acknowledging that it "absolutely, definitely" reflects his gay sensibilities. "It's based on a real experience of mine, but it's like a surreal non-linear interpretation of it. If I could describe it, I probably wouldn't have made a puppet show."

The Araneidae Show, which runs just over 30 minutes, will be preceded by two shorter pieces: *Angel's Tarantella* features an angel puppet, and *Stickman* uses a simple marionette that becomes unusually evocative in Twist's hands.

Next up for Twist is a return New York engagement of *Peter and Wendy*, the acclaimed Mabou Mines production that traveled to Berkeley Rep in 1998. And he's still working on an elaborate show with Mabou Mines involving a wind machine.

"I work a lot," he said, "but I'm not a wealthy person at all. I actually need more money."

It is the nature of Twist's art that it can only grow so much before it changes into something else entirely. "Yes," he agreed, "and it's definitely a financial restriction on how you work, because I also tend to do elaborate shows. *The Araneidae Show* is elaborate in its own miniature way."

For ticket information call 621 7978.