

Like an Itch That Can't Be Scratched

by Kimiko Shimoda, Oregon Shakespeare Theater

Itch in the Stitch, performance by Pavel Zuštiak presents an exposé of “seen and unseen worlds,” and proffers an anxious longing through its images, movement, and spoken word.

The piece begins with video footage of brightly colored, fast-moving, twitching representations such as various insects burrowing and bursts of light. Zuštiak’s still silhouette in the slight foreground initially suggests a presence overshadowed by a universe of perpetual movement in action. A fluid band in the middle of the screen guides the audience through each series of visuals like a match in a tunnel.

Zuštiak’s strong command of technique is clear from the moment the lights come up on his padded, bulbous shape (a type of “fat suit” or shell he later sheds). He remains strapped to a stool throughout the first section of movement. The title resonates as Zuštiak works through movements that recall the bugs seen moving on the screen. At the same time, a very human struggle seems to be taking place within the self as well as against the outside world.

While Zuštiak does manage to escape the confinement of his stool, flames burn on the screen in the background while spoken words and sounds converge to procure a lament that seeks to confront some inner turmoil. He bites into apples, yet cannot swallow their substance and spits them into a bowl—a pattern repeated over and over. Zuštiak finally manages to escape the cocoon that has encapsulated him.

Like knowledge that can be tasted, but not swallowed...yearning to be liberated, yet seeking to understand that which enchains...powerful and raw...like an itch that can't be scratched...