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## THE H'S: THE SPASMS OF A REQUIEM (A MEDITATION ON THE EFFECTS OF ROMANTICISM, MODERN ARCHITECTURE AND THE LOVE OF ADVENTURE IN THE LIFE OF A SUICIDE VICTIM)

Last night, I found more documentary remnants for *The H's: the Spasms of a Requiem* – the performance. The piece was based on my book, hand printed by Brian Richard's Bloody Twin Press. The work had DeMaupassant phrases throughout and was about a man who dies over and over by different means.

I was extremely lucky to have lived in Gainesville, Florida when Jill Burton was home from her performances in New York. Her extended vocal techniques and stage presence in the best alternative venues transferred well to *The H's*. We collaborated and Jill's group Sumac and musician colleagues created memorable performances.

For this event at the Samuel Harn Museum auditorium on the U of F campus, we received New Forms support and later recognition awards from the State of Florida. On the web, I created a documentary of the production, complete with animation. Original films have been located.



Christy Sheffield Sanford, foreground, with Sumac: Anneliese Diaz, left, Donald Wade Posey, Gregory Jones and Jill Burton. Full article from *The Gainesville Sun* at end of this exhibit.



## *SOMERSAULTS* (With Goddess Stomp)



Four women in black combat boots and black, ankle-length veils over body suits huddle upstage. Three are alter egos for the fourth, Mireille, the widow. The moans of the women swell into wails and gulping sobs. Eyes forward, arms swinging, Mireille leads with her pelvis as she advances toward the audience. The other women follow, holding up her veil as though she were a bride instead of a widow. Mireille suppresses an occasional chuckle. The procession enters the audience. Lights go down. Unveiled, Mireille rolls in the aisle. The other women join her. All wear pink and red fluorescent paint. They break into fits of bacchanalian hysteria. Lights come up slowly. Exhausted, the women reattach their veils and softly moaning, resume their march. Mireille blows her nose; the alter egos, her shadows, blow theirs. A snicker erupts from a shadow.

1) Yellow-green text contains  
Guy de Maupassant phrases.

cut from a crouch      always use a protractor      red legs stretched beside  
poppies      one arm: long, stationary; the other: short, adjustable      her tin  
milk-pail      the type with a clip      Would you like a drop?      little  
swallows  
plums in her pocket      resin caramelizing on the blade  
Are you trying to drink?      wet the forefinger      She kissed him  
passionately.      arm bucking      He leaned over . . . so far . . . a  
somersault; and . . . he fell . . . he fell . . .

## Goddess Stomp

Unveiled, front and center in camouflage jackets, the four women hold their rifles at port arms. They perform a percussive number with their boots-a fast, third-world military shuffle, a running in place with primal rhythms and instruments that hiss and rasp.



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*Italicized phrases from Guy de Maupassant's "Two Little Soldiers." Christy Sheffield Sanford, Copyright © 1996.*



# *TRIPTYCH Panel #1*

## *LAWS OF THE JUNGLE*



This is not a fable; this is not Peter and the Wolf. The animals are real, wild. Walking through the jungle, you stumble over a python, thick as your thigh. It heads for a hole. The first car-length disappears. You grab the tail, begin to pull.



The natives rush to your aid. You check for gender. "She" slides forward, you heave-back and forth, back and forth-each time you gain a foot, at last a forked tongue. As in a porno flick, you guide the jutting head into a hood. Back at camp, you drop the thrashing bundle into a black locker.



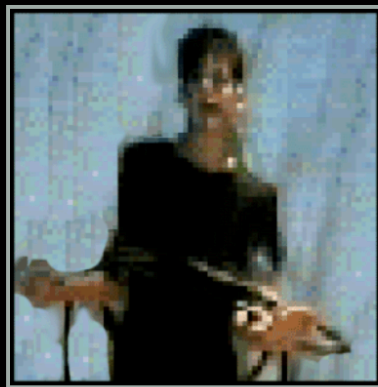
You return to the hole. Like an archeologist, you dig carefully, widening the dank, black mouth with a silver spoon. Ahhh. A dozen eggs.

That night, your servant fills a wash tub, scrubs your back, brings you a whiskey, neat. You dress for dinner, splash yourself with cologne.



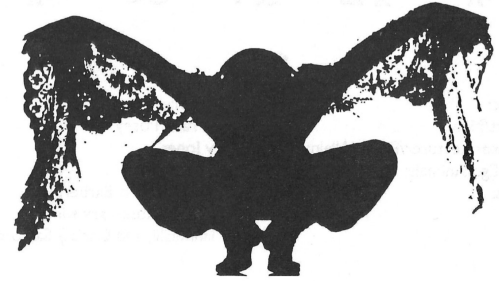
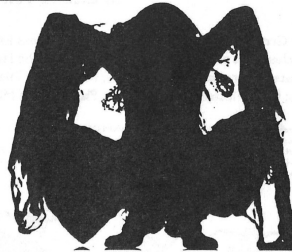
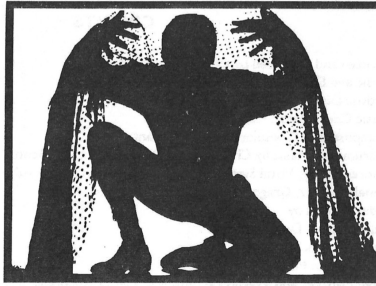
Spoon in hand you tap the first egg all around, lift off the top. Inside, a sleepy, ready to squiggle python. With a long barbecue fork, you skewer and grill it over fennel. Five: more than enough to satisfy. You wash them down with red wine, wipe your mouth with pink linen.





You hear the cries of a monkey, then a leopard. A native warns you, "A male python is disguising his voice,"-a mimic bent on revenge. You scoff then climb into bed. The sounds advance as you twitch in your dreams. The snake glides across a grass mat, wraps around your legs, squeezes. He has an erection. You scream, the snake crushes your chest, menaces your face. With both hands, you pry it from your neck. You have a clear shot; blow his head off.

Sex is so glamorous, you forgive the perversities. What will become of the female in the black box?



## THE H'S: THE SPASMS OF A REQUIEM

(A Meditation on the Effects of Romanticism,  
Modern Architecture and the Love of Adventure  
in the Life of a Suicide Victim)

### Starring:

SUMAC  
Jill Burton  
Anneliese Diaz  
Donald Wade Posey  
and special guest  
Gregory Jones

### With:

Scott Walton  
David Durant  
Chris Barber

## A SPOKEN OPERA



Photo by Stephen Morton  
The Gainesville Sun

## THE H'S: THE SPASMS OF A REQUIEM

Written and Produced  
by  
Christy Sheffield Sanford

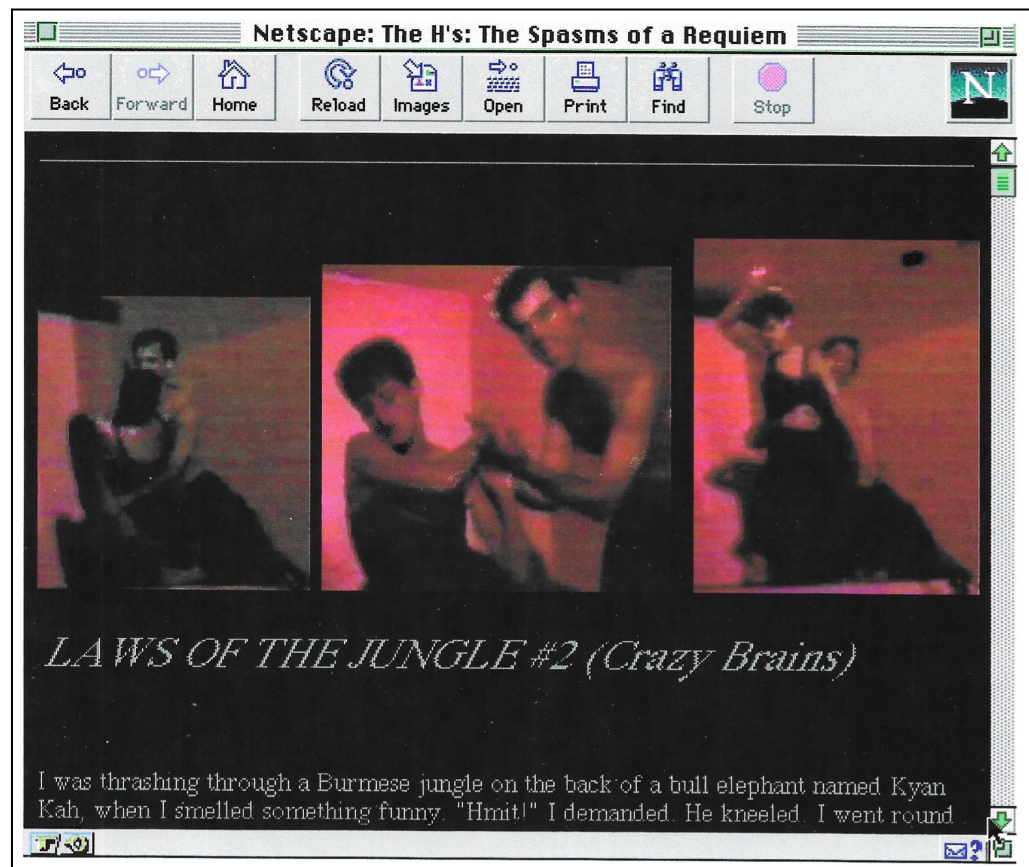
HARN MUSEUM - AUDITORIUM  
SATURDAY, JULY 18 AT 2 P.M. AND 8 P.M.  
SUNDAY, JULY 19 AT 2 P.M. AND 8 P.M.  
ADMISSION IS FREE

The H's: The Spasms of a Requiem, written in response to the death of a friend looks not at his particular life but at influences on his formative years, the 1940s and '50s. Although a narrator tells the story of a triangle, more importantly the text is a series of meditations on three major motifs: the love of adventure, romanticism and the longing for simplicity. At times the different strains are treated separately and at times fused. The text is alternately layered and unlayered. Christy Sheffield Sanford is the author of many published mixed genre works. Her last theatrical presentation was The Ballerina and the Sea Anemone.



The H's is realized by SUMAC, an experimental vocal quartet made up of members Jill Burton, Anneliese Diaz, and Donald Wade Posey, and special guest Gregory Jones. Although SUMAC specializes in a cappella music and improvising and composing their own work, they have chosen to collaborate with writer, producer Sanford. They have created a work, operatic in effect, with extended vocal techniques and spoken word as the major forms of delivery. Scott Walton, David Durant and Chris Barber have created music and sound effects complementary to the vocalizations. SUMAC has performed to critical acclaim at the Sub-Tropics Music Festival, The Thomas Center, Santa Fe Community College, and numerous clubs.





#### CAST

Mirelle:	Anneliese Diaz
Robert/Mimi:	Donald Wade Posey
Narrator/Lecturer/Priest/Allain:	Gregory Jones
Alter Ego/Animals:	Jill Burton
Extras:	Scott Walton, Chris Barber, David Durant, Rosemary Kimble, Marita Iannucilli, and Christy Sanford

#### ACT I

SCENE 1:	Somersaults (with Goddess Stomp)
SCENE 2:	The H's: The Spasms of A Requiem
SCENE 3:	Flashback #1, The Kinetic Museum
SCENE 4:	Laws of the Jungle #1
SCENE 5:	Wailing
SCENE 6:	Funeral Arrangement

#### INTERMISSION

#### ACT II

SCENE 1:	The Color Scheme
SCENE 2:	Hand Jive
SCENE 3:	Flashback #2, the Tête-à-Tête
SCENE 4:	Laws of the Jungle #2
SCENE 5:	Complicated Night (Ground Level)
SCENE 6:	The Send Off

#### CREDITS

Written and Produced by Christy Sheffield Sanford  
 Music and Dance Director: Jill Burton  
 Artistic Director: Christy Sheffield Sanford  
 Music Coordinator: Scott Walton  
 Compositional Consultant: David Durant  
 Instrumental Music by Chris Barber, David Durant, and Scott Walton  
 Choreography, Vocal Settings and Stage Direction developed collaboratively by Jill Burton, Anneliese Diaz, Gregory Jones and Donald Wade Posey  
 Slides: Lyda Toy  
 Videography: Donna Mitchell  
 Lighting: Bruce Ruiz  
 Sound: Tom Miller  
 Stage Manager and Wardrobe Mistress: Marita Iannucilli  
 Props Master: Don Holbrook  
 Video Projection: Rose Stasuk  
 Slide Projection: Tom Sanford  
 Assistant to the Director: Rosemary Kimble  
 Lighting Assistant: Edward McCallister  
 Selected Costumes: Persona  
 Angel Costumes: Alice Hehr  
 Costume Consultant: Anneliese Diaz

Videos conceived by Christy Sheffield Sanford  
 Camerawork and editing by Donna Mitchell  
 Program Photography: Donna Mitchell  
 Special effects and special effects editing by Andy King/Micron Green  
 Original footage for the *Red Elephant* video derived from *The Elephant Boy*  
*Purple Skies* video derived from footage in *Koyaanisquatsi*  
 Occasional phrases and plot lines from the work of Guy De Maupassant

#### SPECIAL THANKS

Gail Gross, early musical compositions and ideas for the project; Ashima Boutique; The Rancher; Luis and Patti Diaz; The Edit Suite; The Hippodrome State Theater; Acrosstown Theater; Everyman Sound; WUFT; Rie Burton, The Florida Supporters of Experimental Arts; Harn Museum of Art; Sophie Plassard; and Michael York

This project is supported in part by the HARN MUSEUM OF ART, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, and by NEW FORMS FLORIDA, a program administered by the Florida Dance Association, Miami-Dade Community College, Wolfson Campus and the Metro-Dade Cultural Affairs Council. NEW FORMS FLORIDA is funded by the Inter-Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Metro-Dade Cultural Affairs Council and Board of County Commissioners, and the Florida Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Arts Council.



# Sanford, Sumac unite for a 'spoken opera'

By DINA NELSON

Sun correspondent

It was through grief that the idea came to her. Christy Sheffield Sanford was trying to get herself together after she heard about the suicide of a close friend, and through a series of meditations, she began thinking about and eventually writing "The H's: The Spasms of a Requiem."

This "spoken opera," as Sanford calls it, will be performed Saturday and Sunday at 2 and 8 p.m. in the Harn Museum of Art auditorium. All performances are free.

The heavily narrated work, subtitled "A Meditation on the Effects of Romanticism, Modern Architecture and the Love of Adventure in the Life of a Suicide Victim," includes dance, vocal techniques and music by Gainesville's Sumac, an experimental vocal quartet.

Sumac consists of Jill Burton, Anneliese Diaz, Donald Wade Posey and new member Gregory Jones.

"The H's" looks not at the suicide victim's particular life, but at influences on his formative years, the 1940s and '50s. The piece delves into three elements 52-year-old Sanford found particularly influential on the attitudes and behaviors of the people of her generation: the longing for simplicity, the search for ideal romanticism and the quest for adventure.

Sanford is an established writer with three books under her belt: "Only the Nude Can Redeem the Landscape," "Bride Thrashing Through History" and "The Cowrie Shell Piece," all of which are mixed genre collections of fiction, poetry and essays. She is currently working on her fourth such book, called "The Italian Smoking Piece," in which she examines American society's newly-established stigma against smoking.

Sanford's work has not gone unnoticed. She said she recently received a \$20,000 grant from the National Endowment of the Arts in recognition of her writing. In addition,

## 'The H's: The Spasms of a Requiem'

Where: Harn Museum of Art, at SW 34th Street and Hull Road

When: 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

Admission: Free

tion, for the "The H's: The Spasms of a Requiem," she received a grant from New Forms Florida, an organization that funds collaborative projects and new art forms in Florida. Sanford also received aid from the Harn Museum.

Sanford, an Atlanta native who has lived with husband Malcolm in Gainesville for 11 years, said her friend's suicide forced her to think about the societal influences on the people of her generation.

Sanford read a great deal about the '40s and '50s, particularly much of the popular literature of the day, to find evidence of some of the prevalent societal values during that time. She said she noticed that the "Hemingway hero" was popular: "a macho attitude that assumed man should dominate nature." In retrospect, Sanford said, many people have realized that the attitude led to disregard for and destruction of the environment.

The idea of man controlling nature can be found in the "jungle part" of "The H's," a scene in which an elephant tries to drown a man who is on its back.

"It shows that nature is fighting back from being conquered," Sanford said. "In the '40s and '50s, people thought they could subdue the wild forces of nature, but I'm trying to show that nature resists that."

Another part of the performance centers on a triangle relationship, in which two men are in love with the same woman. Sanford said the scenes deal with the romantic notion many people had that they would find the "perfect love," one person who would fulfill them and rid them of any worries.

were just supposed to revert back to that romanticized stay-at-home role. For a lot of women, it just didn't work."

Sanford said when society's standards of the time conflict with one's beliefs, the effects can be tragic, as may have been the case for her friend.

See OPERA on page 10

"The romantic notion didn't allow for individual growth of either person, especially the woman," she said. "You can see it being depicted in movies now like 'A League of Their Own.' Women were able to do a lot of things while the men were out to war, but the minute the men came back, women

From the Gainesville Sun, Scene Magazine  
July 17, 1992

## OPERA

continued from page 6  
case for her friend.

"It really pays to look at the forces that are operating in your life," she said. "It's really hard to see what's going on when you're in the middle of it, but we are all products of our times."

Sanford admits the times did have an effect on her as well. For instance, even after publishing three books, she still considers herself a "late bloomer," just now studying writing through correspondence at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Yet although she is able to recognize some of the often disruptive influences these elements had on her generation, she does not believe in doing away with romanticism or adventure altogether.

"I still like candles on the table, and I like it when my husband gives me flowers on my birthday," she said. "I don't want to do away with all romance. And the same goes for adventure. I don't like the idea of trapping animals and putting them in zoos or putting their skins on our backs, but I still believe in experiencing the environment without destroying it."

Video and slides, mostly of nature scenes, add to the show, as do the experimental, a cappella sounds of Sumac.

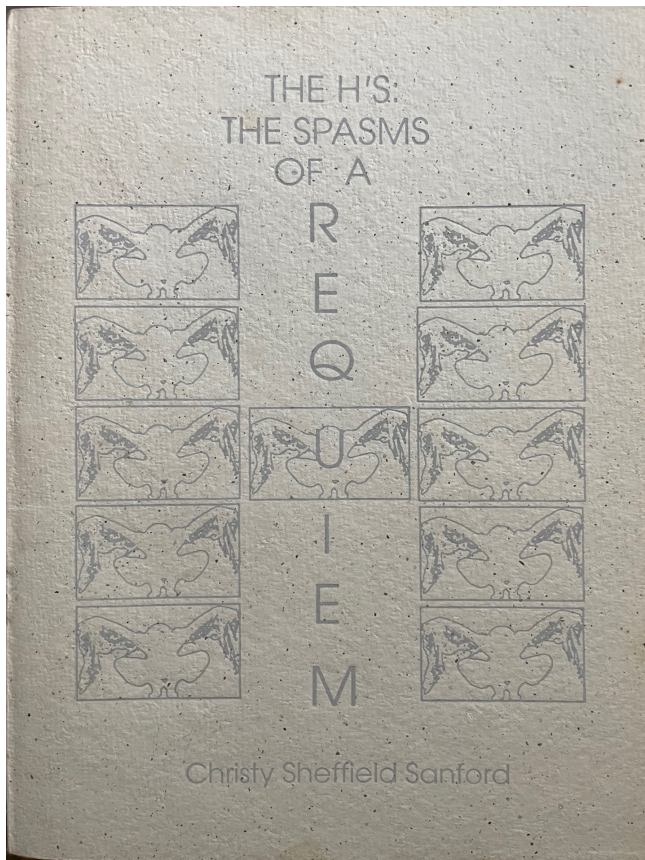
"We're doing all original music for the show," said Sumac's Burton. "We're using tuba and percussion and vocal music where we've arranged a musical way of speaking, set as far as timing and dynamics."

Scott Walton, David Durant and Ted Duras have created music and sound effects to compliment the vocalizing and spoken words.

Sanford's first theatrical piece, "Sur les Pointes," was performed at the Reitz Union and Gainesville Community Playhouse two years ago. That piece, translated to mean "On the Tips of the Toes," traced the life of a prima ballerina who lived in the 1800s, and paralleled her life with that of a sea anemone.

"I'm very fortunate to have the opportunity to do what I do and work with wonderful people," she said. "I'm really excited about this performance. I just know it's going to be a trip."





THE H'S: THE SPASMS OF A REQUIEM (A Meditation on the Effects of Romanticism, Modern Architecture and the Love of Adventure in the Life of a Suicide Victim), Bloody Twin Press, Stout, OH, 1994.

THE H'S: THE SPASMS OF A REQUIEM (A Meditation on the Effects of Romanticism, Modern Architecture and the Love of Adventure in the Life of a Suicide Victim), Documentary Online, 1996.

STATE OF FLORIDA FELLOWSHIP (Interdisciplinary Category), Recognition for Work Associated with the Spoken Opera, *The H's: the Spasms of a Requiem* (Writer, Producer, Co-Director, Video Collaborator), 1994-95.

HARN MUSEUM OF ART (University of Florida), Performance Funding for *The H's: the Spasms of a Requiem*, Collaboration with Jill Burton, 1992.

NEW FORMS FLORIDA (Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, Metro-Dade Cultural Affairs Council and Florida Department of State), Creation Phase Funding of *The H's: the Spasms of a Requiem*, 1991-92.