

# SOUNDLIFE

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2005 • THENEWSTRIEBUNE.COM/SOUNDLIFE • SECTION E

## PREVIEW

# Grudges get multifaceted look onstage

**Just in time for family holiday celebrations, Callous Physical Theatre presents 'Grudge Match,' a play in 15 rounds.**

**BY JEN GRAVES**  
The News Tribune

Despite the best intentions, every year, grudges crash family holiday gatherings like undesirables delivered in the night by a shadow team of malevolent reindeer.

This is why two pairs of women on all fours were on the floor at Barefoot Studios one recent Friday, roaring menacingly at each other before retreating into their respective corners of the stage.

It's "Grudge Match" — "a performance event in 15 rounds," said Paul Zmolek, co-director with his spouse, Joséphine, of both the new professional company, Callous Physical Theatre, and the colorful Dome District venue where the company performs, Barefoot Studios.

The evening-length original work, with portions of dance, music, theater and spoken word, runs Friday and Saturday.

"With careful tending, a grudge can last as long as you live," chimed the statuesque Stephanie Kriege, a portrait of 1950s decorum in white high-society gloves, a hat and those classic nuggets of social legitimacy, pearls.

All four performers — Kriege plus Mary Chase, Katharine M. Stricker and Jenna Veatch — begin the performance in "ladylike" getup, replete with mink and bear stoles. Eventually, each woman strips down to shiny shorts and a tank top: boxing wear. (Only the pearls remain throughout.)

In movement, music, words and gestures, the women explore the deep-seated motivations, satisfactions and destructions of refusing to forgive wrongs or slights, from the petty to the murderous. Each of 15 discrete sections begins with the sounding of the boxing bell and the recorded cheers of a crowd.

The Zmoleks and the quartet of performers created "Grudge Match" over four intense weeks of rehearsal preceded by a period of journaling designed to fuel the process.

"I asked them to write about a time when they had a grudge, or a time when they wanted forgiveness," Paul said.

To cast a broader net, he Googled "grudge," finding essays, definitions and quotes by Robert Kennedy, Alexander Pope and Confucius, among others.

The Zmoleks are trained in and passionate about theater, dance, music and visual art, and their philosophy is aggressively interdisciplinary.

While that might send away purists, it yields gems for the more open of mind, such as Veatch's folksy ukulele version of Nina Simone's "I Bear No Grudge" in this performance. Simone's original drips with threat, not reconciliation. But Veatch recast the lyrics without ever having heard that song, producing a strangely charming version that pushes across the same point in a different way.

The choreography is like a physical toxicology report on residual anger, with references to 20th-century political history, television characters, the language of advertising and therapy and the brutality of simple gamesmanship, including a primal, uncomfortable section that's little more than a serious game of musical chairs.

In spite of moments devoted to forgiveness and a general striving toward peace, real, lasting absolution feels far from these bloodthirsty proceedings. Instead, "Grudge Match" is a catharsis. May audiences return to their families at least temporarily cleansed.

**Jen Graves: 253-597-8568**  
[jen.graves@thenewstribune.com](mailto:jen.graves@thenewstribune.com)

**WHAT:** Callous Physical Theatre's "Grudge Match"

**WHEN:** 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday

**WHERE:** Barefoot Studios, 311 Puyallup Ave., Tacoma

**TICKETS:** \$12

**INFORMATION:** 253-627-2273,  
[www.barefootcallous.org](http://www.barefootcallous.org)