

What A Stranger May Know

Arts & Culture

Apr 25, 2012

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A Student Performance in Memory of the Virginia Tech Shooting

On the afternoon of April 16, six Eugene Lang students, dressed in black, performed a unique kind of memorial around Wollman Hall. Under the direction of Lang Professor Zishan Ugurlu, each student recited lengthy monologues simultaneously.



Lang Performing Arts students simultaneously recite plays, each about a victim of the Virginia Tech Shooting, that were written by Eric Ehn from Brown University. By Henry Miller

Some of them also played musical instruments, like the guitar or saxophone.

Eric Ehn, Director of Playwriting at Brown University, wrote the monologues as a performance memorial to the 32 victims of the Virginia Tech shooting of April 16, 2007. Five years after the tragedy, the project was performed on 24 university campuses across the country, including Whittier College, the University of Texas at Austin, and Brown University. The families of six of the victims declined to allow their parts to be used in the national performance.

Through the cacophony of the voices all speaking at once, Ehn's piece aims at creating an atmosphere of solemn meditation, to be wandered through by audience members. Eugene Lang's press release on The New Schools Events Calendar online, describes it as "an outsider's meditation on the lives of the victims of the Virginia Tech shooting," and claims that it does not solely focus on the lives of the victims, but also the struggle society faces after tragedy.

For each part, Ehn interviewed families and friends of the victims, some of which had reservations about the project. Many parts of the monologues contain Biblical references, and several of them are spoken in Spanish, French, or Portuguese.

Apart from being a living memorial, the project also intends to look into the nature of remembrance and mourning in America.