



Monday
»Next Story»

News
Local News
Opinion
Personal Tech
Sports
Currents Monday
Front Page (PDF)
The Last Week
Sunday
Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday

Weekly Sections

Books | UT-Books
Family
Food
Health
Home
Homescape
Dialog
InStyle
Night & Day
Sunday Arts
Travel
Quest
Wheels

Subscribe to the UT



Sponsored Links
Scottrade Stock

The San Diego Union-Tribune.

[SAVE THIS](#)
[EMAIL THIS](#)
[PRINT THIS](#)
[MOST POPULAR](#)

THEATER REVIEW

Presenting Beckett (without Beckett)

Oh, he's there, all right, but audiences must find him in Sledgehammer's challenging theatrical installation

By Anne Marie Welsh
THEATER CRITIC

May 14, 2007

If the collaborators on Sledgehammer's newest project wanted merely to be clever, they might have upended Pirandello's famed title and named their work "Three Artists in Search of an Author."

Instead, they've created an experience in which the searchers are us — you, me and anyone else willing to piece together meanings and perhaps a portrait of the mordant modernist Samuel Beckett from the sights and sounds assembled in a Mission Hills storefront.

"Beckett3" conjures the Irish writer indirectly in his impact upon the collaborators: writer-director Scott Feldsher, composer Tim Root and their visual partner, artist Becky Guttin.



LAURA EMBRY / Union-Tribune
"Beckett3" conjures the gleefully grim writer for the artists (from left, Becky Guttin, Scott Feldsher, Tim Root) whose installation meditates upon his work.

Within an empty space — formerly The Comfort Zone furniture store — the trio has created a theatrical installation that includes an almost conventional lobby complete with soaring sculptures. Enter the "theater," though, and a wholly different experience awaits.

Stones line the pathway leading inside. You can talk during this "show." You can move in any direction and wander freely about for as long as you wish — a few minutes or two hours, your call. There are platforms to climb, peepholes to explore, a cubbyhole to visit, several videos to watch. There's little seating and no fixed beginning or end to the temporal and spatial experience. "Comfortable shoes and an

DATEBOOK

"Beckett3"
7:30 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays, two Sundays, through June 3.
Sledgehammer Uptown,
4025 Goldfinch St..

Advertisements from the print edition

MIRAMAR CAFE
Breakfast • Lunch • Dinner
GREEK, AMERICAN & MEXICAN SPECIALTIES

WINE 7128 Miramar Rd., San Diego OPEN
BEER 858-695-9167 7 DAYS
HRS: MON 6AM TO 4PM • TUES. - SAT. 6AM-8PM • SUNDAY 7AM - 3PM

THE ULTIMATE AWARD-WINNING NEW YORK-STYLE DELI
Known for our pastries, corned beef, lox and kasha

• 124 Great Sandwiches and Burgers • Pastrami
 • Smoked Cabbage Rolls • Blintzes • Cheesed Liver
 • Matzo Ball Soup • Potato Kishkes • Onochevitz
 • Eye Bread • Soda Fountain • Cheesecakes
 • Rugelach • Lox and Bagels
 • Chicken Caesar Salad
 • Bakery and Catering

D.Z. Akin's
restaurant / delicatessen / bakery / fountain
6930 Alvarado Road • San Diego • 619/265-0218
Monday thru Thursday 10am-10pm • Friday and Saturday 10am-11pm

Scottrade: Stock Trading

\$7 Stock trades online. Get prices, charts & research for free.
www.Scottrade.com

Are you "PM" Certified?

Villanova Project Management Certification 8 weeks- Enroll Now.
www.VillanovaU.com...

A Reverse Mortgage in CA?

Near 70? You May Qualify for a Larger Loan Amount. Find Out How Much More!
NewRetirement.com

[Buy a link here](#)

open mind are encouraged," these Sledgehammer collaborators tell visitors.

For theatergoers enamored of tradition, the experience may be disorienting. There are no actors, just the viewer's activated imagination.

In some ways, this evocative and thoroughly enjoyable installation harkens back to 1980s performance art, the sort of peripatetic work made by Chris Hardman and his San Francisco-based Antenna Theater. But "Beckett" is both more loosely constructed than those walking pieces and more poetic. Feldsher calls the piece "a sensory narrative."

Grief and laughter

Beckett, as both novelist and playwright, carries special weight for Feldsher, who has directed several of his plays and studied the writer since his undergraduate days at UCSD. There, Feldsher met the other fledgling artists who would join together to found Sledgehammer: composer Root, who has created the music and soundscape as well as some visuals for "Beckett"; filmmaker Ethan Feerst and actor Bruce McKenzie; and designer Robert Brill, whose most recent work was the set for the San Diego Opera's innovative, Des McAnuff-directed "Wozzeck."

Root recently returned from Seattle with two new musical scores and a wealth of sonic paraphernalia for "Beckett." Root proudly noted recently that he was "in the canyon" for the first Sledge piece, the site-specific, outdoor production of Heiner Muller's politically charged "Despoiled Shore" in a La Jolla canyon in 1985.

After a 10-year stint as a software designer at Microsoft, he returned to composing – and to Sledge. In 2005 he conducted the seven-piece band that accompanied "A/Wake," the somber yet raucous deconstruction of Sledge's former home, St. Cecilia's. Root played keyboards and power tools and sang a wordless aria of gurgles, whinnies and other sounds as Sledge became homeless again.

For "Beckett," he composed two pieces (one for percussion, another for strings) and also made two sonic sculptures. These large wooden frames contain hanging speakers of many sizes and shapes, which he calls "speaker puppets." They not only transmit the recorded sound, but also move as they play.

So too does the main sculptural installation by Guttin. Titled "A Lace Chorus," this forest of curved organic shapes hangs on slender threads and shimmers silver-and-black in the light; interior spaces of the shapes and the viewer's own face or body get reflected back by strategically placed and tilted mirrors on the carpeted floor.

Said Guttin before the opening: "It's not just a frontal experience." No indeed.

*750 Montgomery St.,
Mission Hills; \$20; (619)
544-1484 or
info@sledgehammer.org.*



Associated Press
Samuel Beckett, seen here in 1966, famously protected his words.

Guttin's other large piece is a series of black-and-white panels combining calligraphy and an original language of hieroglyphs; these "documents" stand on pedestals and are encased in plexiglass so they can be seen and "read" from both sides. A transplant from Mexico City, Guttin works with what she calls a "full-bodied, Korean-style of calligraphy involving large brushes."

For Guttin, the project was especially intriguing. "I've never worked with a whole group of talented people from different (disciplines)," she said one afternoon when she was still writing Feldsher's text, using a wide white marker on black-painted walls.

She and Feldsher discovered that not only did their artistic sensibilities mesh, but both were raised Jewish and knew Hebrew. Guttin's paper pieces include text written in many languages, including the language of the Torah.

Advertisement - [Your Ad Here](#)

The first images viewers see as they travel over the stony pathway into the installation proper are the words of the Kaddish, which Guttin wrote on mirrored surfaces. They introduce a series of Feldsher's poetic meditations upon death – that bugaboo for Beckett's clowns Didi and Gogo and the anti-heroes of his fiction. Without naming him, Feldsher's text specifically ponders the death of Alan Schneider, the theater legend who inspired him.

His interest in directing was sealed, he said, when he was a freshman at UCSD taking an upper-level course on playwright Edward Albee from Schneider, founder of the directing program at the university. Decades earlier, Schneider had staged the original "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" He remained a favorite director of Albee and Beckett.

Soon after Feldsher met and worked with him, Schneider died in a freak accident in London, where he was to direct another Beckett play. When he approached a curb on his way to mail a letter, being American, he looked the wrong way before stepping into the street. He never saw the motorcycle that was bearing down from the other direction; it struck and killed him.

But "Beckett" is not just about such personal sorrow or the private imagery of three disparate, though complementary artists.

Several "stops" along the way directly connect to Beckett's existential dramas or evoke imagery from his trilogy of novels ("Molloy," "Malone Dies," "The Unnamable"). In one two-level "tomb," for instance, there is a set model including the blasted tree of "Waiting for Godot." Another features the waist-high sand surrounding Winnie in "Happy Days" and a third evokes the end-of-life ruminations of "Krapp's Last Tape." Also displayed are sugary Day of the Dead skulls and Feldsher's elliptical texts, written on walls or spoken on video.

Other images, seen through plexiglass peepholes, are more oblique: a man made of sand with a looping video projection in his belly; a tree

made of pages from Beckett's "Godot" text; a short film with voice-over featuring a single, framed eye, a kind of riff on the feminine mouth framed by a curtain in Beckett's short play "Not I."

Thematically, two currents ripple and merge in this thoughtful installation – the grim pratfalling finality of death and the ultimate elusiveness of identity, including that of the author, to whom Sledge pays such sly homage.

Beckett (and now his estate) was famously firm about how his words were used. In 1984, when avant-garde director Joanne Akalaitis wanted to stage his "Endgame" in a subway station rather than the bare room called for in the script, the playwright tried but wasn't able to shut down the production. Still, Akalaitis had to include in the program a letter from the playwright objecting to the production.

Because of such proscriptions, Feldsher and Root knew they would not use any of the playwrights' words and therefore would not need actors to speak them.

"We reached the point of realizing we would do Beckett without actors. And then we decided to do Beckett without Beckett," Feldsher said. "I think he would smile at that."

■ Anne Marie Welsh: (619) 293-1265; anne-marie.welsh@uniontrib.com

[»Next Story»](#)

Sponsored Links

[1 Rule To Lose Your Gut](#)

I cut down 38 lbs of pure body fat in just 19 weeks with this 1 rule.
HelensDiet.com/Blog

[Bipolar Support Program](#)

Thinking Forward® Offers You Free Info, Tools & Advice. Sign Up Now.
BipolarTreatmentInfo.com

[Scottrade: Stock Trading](#)

\$7 Stock trades online. Get prices, charts & research for free.
www.Scottrade.com

[Are you "PM" Certified?](#)

Villanova Project Management Certification 8 weeks- Enroll Now.
www.VillanovaU.com/PM

[1 Flat Stomach Diet Works](#)

I lost 47 lbs of body fat with this 1 easy diet I saw on Rachael Ray.
HelensDiet.com/Secret

[Buy a link here](#)

[Contact SignOnSanDiego.com](#) | [Online Media Kit](#) | [Print Media Kit](#) | [Frequently Asked Questions](#) | [Make us your homepage](#)
[Contact the Union-Tribune](#) | [About the Union-Tribune](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Your California Privacy Rights](#)

© Copyright 2007 Union-Tribune Publishing Co. • A Copley Newspaper Site

