

The Sublime Beauty of Hands/Klown Kantos

Tony Adler

If Michael Montenegro is one of Chicago theater's best-kept secrets, it's largely because he's kept the secret himself. Though he's created marvelous puppets—starkly beautiful mechanisms that seem to harbor their own, powerful narratives—for productions by the likes of Mary Zimmerman, his own shows have been infrequent, irregular, under-the-radar affairs. Which is terrible, because he's as extraordinary a performer as he is a visual artist. I've known Montenegro for years (he's had a close relationship with the Actors Gymnasium, which I cofounded), and have always been exasperated by the diffidence that kept his talent hidden. Now the veil may be falling away. Montenegro has started a "puppet symbolist theatre," Theatre Zarko, which is mounting its first local production. The double bill includes Klown Kantos, a collection of older comic pieces, some of which highlight Montenegro's physical skills by pitting him against rebellious body parts. The main attraction, The Sublime Beauty of Hands, is a work of "visual poetry" that, Montenegro says, uses dream images to consider "the waste and misuse of creativity."