Immersive art event unites town

By **Anika Utke** - May 10, 2018



For those who chose St. Olaf exclusively because of its similarity to the town of Stars Hollow in Gilmore Girls, this weekend's Northfield Experience truly delivers. Running Friday to Sunday, the Northfield Experience ran across the entire town in 7 locations, featuring theatre, dance, visual projections, digital media and a town coming together. Though dampened by transportation mishaps which included groups being abandoned and a near show-stopping thunderstorm, the collaborative event directed by Stephan Koplowitz was a hit with every attendee.

For those who missed out or just wants to relive the experience, here is a rundown.

Beginning at The Grand Theater, attendees were led into a darkened theater to the upstairs balcony, where a series of projections set the mood. Then, guests were treated to an ambitious performance by Carleton and St. Olaf students documenting the history of Northfield in 10 minutes. Highlights were the raid of Jesse James, the continuing gag of "gender equality at last", a cow churning butter not once, but twice, and the double Carleton dropout Peter Tork.

From there, groups were divided into color-coordinated tours and the itinerary changed.

While one group may head to the historic bank where the defeat of Jesse James occurred for a projection presentation, another may visit the Hvistendahl, Moersch, Dorsey and Hahn at the Historic Bank Building for immersive visuals and sound.

Visitors rushed to the Northfield Train Depot for the bustling dance performance Moving Past the Past. This is easily one of the most impressive portions of the event, moving with colorful suitcases in tow to an equally colorful original score by St. Olaf senior Elijah Baumgartner '18. Also featuring original compositions by a St. Olaf student is junior Michael Creighton '19. who scored the performance Reading Time, located at The Northfield Public Library.

Choreographed like a moving clock, this dance which opens on students studying at a library is so well done and upbeat that it will motivate you to actually want to study for finals. To get a true sense

of how spectacular this performance is, it should be recognized that I saw it five times and was almost trampled at least twice and it was still worth it.

From the depot, guests walked to the Northfield Arts Guild Theater where they are greeted by a cast of characters and find themselves trapped within a time loop. Never fear though, because still on the agenda is the Northfield Arts Guild Gallery, a chance to wave at the float passing by with students from Olaf and Carleton and an encounter with The Orphaned Ole Choral Society where the lucky may even receive a personal serenade.

It all boils down to a climatic finishing number with over 200 performers in The Northfield Cemetery. Attendees are greeted with a slow hum as they pass through an arch composed of Viking Chorus, Manitou Singers and Carleton Choirs. After completion, the choirs disband and groups of ten singers surround a trio of dancers throughout the cemetery, each with their own unique flairs.

On one side of the cemetery, you may pass a performance with Acappella video game noises, another with girlish anime giggles and yet another with loud clapping. It is truly an experience that sparks ones senses like a mouthful of Pop Rocks. This transitions to a hauntingly beautiful finish with the three choirs merging as one singing as the dancers traipse up through the graveyard. What begins as quiet and hushed grows to a crescendo that leaves visitors feeling cleansed and refreshed.

More than anything, one leaves feeling even more connected to the town the event is named for. The Northfield Experience truly highlights the best of its town: through history, art, performance and the strength in a community that manages to pull together and collaborate for an unforgettable event that makes its town proud.

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