

## THEATER REVIEW

BY STEVEN LEIGH MORRIS

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**GD THE SERPENT** Jean-Claude van Itallie's 1968 "ceremony" — which uses physical theater and group dynamics to depict scenes from the Book of Genesis — has been showing up in the last few years in small theaters from St. Petersburg, Florida, to Tampa to Berkeley, and now in a Hollywood warehouse. This is a fair indication that the thematic loss of innocence at its core has a renewed pertinence to our times. (It was originally presented by New York's Open Theatre in Rome, in the throes of the Vietnam War and in the wake of assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King Jr.) Perhaps it's the feeling that our war on terror has served up a draconian assault on mythic American virtues of openness, fairness and our adherence to objective law rather than brutal whim. This, in conjunction with the alarm bells of climate change, really does take us back to the Garden of Eden, and a reinvigorated meditation on what, exactly, has happened to us. Director Chris Covics directs a barefoot ensemble of 12 dressed in gray workout attire. They stand, move and even breathe as a singular organism. The audience sits in circle around a stage of sand, enclosed as though in a tent, as the company visually enacts moments from Zapruder's film about the JFK assassination. Four women (Kathy Bell Denton, Angela Stern, Brittany Slattery and Kelly Lett) chant lines about beginnings, middles and ends, and losing sight and memory of the beginnings en route to the end. Adam (Alex Carver) blames Eve (Wallis Herst) for his temptation to eat the forbidden apple. In a particularly affecting scene, Cain (Mark Woods), who knows nothing of death, breaks Abel's (Jeremy Guskin) every bone from petty rage, and is then harrowingly distraught after realizing what he's done to his brother. Covics shoots narrow beams of light across the black sand, like rays streaming through a cathedral's stained glass. The closing moments of uplift with the ensemble singing the Beatles' "Blackbird" is a bit pedestrian in what's otherwise a riveting, occasionally redundant and often moving service. UNKNOWN THEATRE, 1110 N. Seward St., Hlywd.; Tues.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 6 p.m.; thru April 7. (323) 466-7781. (Steven Leigh Morris)