



ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

## Storytelling that makes a connection

BY VICTORIA LOOSELEAF

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The older she gets, the younger she seems. That would be irrepressible postmodern dancer-choreographer Simone Forti, a gamin-like septuagenarian who beguiles with her tiny voice, lived-in face, vivid movements and captivating tales. Above all, Forti is a master storyteller, one whose body channels spoken word and thought, the past and present, as a way to live in the world.

In so doing, she becomes that world.

Forti's latest universe, "Turtles All the Way Down," which opened Thursday for eight nights at the Unknown Theater, is actually an ensemble piece. Her third collaboration with Terrence Luke Johnson, Sarah Swenson and Douglas Wadle, it is also improvisational and promises to change with each performance.

The narratives are what link it to earlier works. In an opening duet, Johnson talks about his travels in India, Swenson her problems with love. Soon they begin moving, their sweeping arm gestures, in-your-face walking and backward running bringing the words to life.

Forti, a jester with an empty plastic water jug, enters. Dropping the jug, she rolls around on the floor while verbally riffing on being a child talking on the phone to Europe. Remembering the transatlantic cable, Forti is that cable, slithering and swaying. "Hello, hello," she says, her voice rising, the story turning darker. Bending a

knee, pointing a toe or hunching over, she speaks of war, Jews being rounded up and her mother receiving extra ration stamps.

We want to hear and see more, but it's Wadle's turn to shine. A trombonist, he too talks -- about his brothers, about words, about a brain being sliced -- all the while disassembling his instrument. Eventually, he squats and blows, shaman-like, into a lone valve.

Forti, as if drawn to the sound, steals in, cavorting at the back of a stage strewn with pallets, ladders and giant rolls of flooring. Swenson, undulating in a hooded yellow windbreaker, joins the surreal tableau before Wadle reassembles his ax and lets loose a long drone.

Front and center again, Forti reads a glorious piece about her family's fabric factory in Italy, after which a white sheet is laid on the floor and large colored discs are placed on it. The result looks like an artwork by John Baldessari -- except that these are the dots connecting the performers' lives.

Their final dance is a soothing, blessed affirmation, for us as well as them.

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'Turtles All the Way Down'

Where: Unknown Theater, 1110 Seward St., Hollywood

When: 8 p.m. today; 6 p.m. Sunday, 8 p.m. Thursday, Friday and next Saturday; 6 p.m. Oct. 28

Price: \$22 (\$17 online)

Contact: (323) 466-7781 or

[www.unknowntheater.com](http://www.unknowntheater.com)