



## 'Rocks Karma Arrows' review: Boulder history like you've never seen it before

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BOULDER, Colo. -

The challenge of writing about "Rocks Karma Arrows," a new multi-media piece created by Kirsten Wilson about the history of Boulder, is this: How to describe a show whose subject matter could turn many readers off before the second paragraph, but whose content is startlingly relevant?

Here goes.

"Rocks Karma Arrows" is packed with as much information as a semester of lectures, but it's never a drag.

It employs a diverse set of performance styles and techniques, but it's highly accessible and never pretentious.

It's a look in the mirror -- often an uncomfortable one -- but it's not heavy handed, nor does it peddle guilt or sell shame.

It covers enough ground to leave you breathless, yet gives you room to breathe and think and, finally, to respond.

It's a must see for anyone with even a casual interest in a long list of issues in Boulder, including open space, immigrant communities, home values, hate crimes, cultural diversity -- or lack thereof, media, affordability and the politics surrounding all of them.

Boulder is 150 years old. Turns out the reason we are who we are and live the way we do here at the base of the flatirons isn't an accident.

Prompted first by several reported hate crimes in Boulder in 2005, then spurred by the city's official sesquicentennial celebration this year, Wilson went back and studied the history of Boulder and its surrounding communities, dipping into Denver's past, as well.

"Rocks" shoots straight with details about Chief Niwot, the Arapaho leader who tried to live peacefully with white settlers here before he was gunned down in the Sand Creek Massacre, a mass killing of American Indians perpetrated by Colorado Territory militia in 1864.

It culls tidbits from a Klu Klux Klan publication in Boulder, circa 1910s, when the Klan fanned fear about a rising Catholic population.

It glances at the many different ethnic populations -- Mexican, Greek, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, German-Russian, Irish and more -- lured to Boulder County to work in the mines, and how the powers that be sometimes played them against each other in order to maintain a sense of control of labor and profits.

It explains how during Denver's early days, land was given away free in order to draw white settlers to the burgeoning town. In Boulder, however, town fathers decided to sell plots of land for \$1,000 each, and put strict codes on how homes could be built.

And they say history never repeats.

Wilson acts as a guide during the performance. She's part journalist, part anthropologist, and part theater director.

Members of the 14-person ensemble, including two musicians and a projectionist, play various roles. Many characters are real people, like local historians Dan Corson (Jim Walker), Modupe Labode (Alexis Miles) and Judy Mattivi-Morley (Rebecca Brown Adelman). The script effectively uses parts of interviews Wilson conducted with the trio.

Images of people from Boulder's past and the area in various stages of development are projected onto a large scrim at the ATLAS Center's Black Box Theatre.

Seeing CU's Old Main building standing alone on a treeless plateau, as it was 110 years ago, is remarkable. Looking at images of American Indians who, some 40 years before that, were brutalized is heartbreaking.

Through it all, a rough elegance emerges.

Most importantly, "Rocks" prompts discussion. It's a relevant discussion. Join it.

Contact Camera Theater Critic Mark Collins at 303-473-1369 or [BDCTheater@comcast.net](mailto:BDCTheater@comcast.net).

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