

Performance group delivers acute portrayal of military resilience |

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It was an uncompromisingly honest and emotional performance Wednesday night, as Nichols Theatre played host to the debut presentation of The Joe Goode Performance Group's performance, "Human Kind: What Does it Mean to be Resilient?"

With ninety percent of the spoken lines coming verbatim from the stories and accounts of those coping with the stresses that come with a military lifestyle, there was little theatrical illusion. Truth was abundant, and the emotions were raw for many audience members.

Courtney Hall, freshman in theater, was taken aback by the portrayal of her father's story of resilience.

"It was straight from my dad's mouth. All of it," Hall said. "I've heard that speech [of pulling his soldiers' limbs from the water after an attack] a million times, but tonight it has a whole new meaning."

Hall, who said that at one point she burst into tears during the performance, wasn't the only one in the audience to feel the emotional reality presented on the stage.

Todd Holmberg, director at McCain Auditorium, was another.

"Seeing these almost naked souls baring themselves on stage to a complete stranger, wow," Holmberg said. "I was sitting next to one of the family members and I purposely did not look at her face for fear that I would start crying."

The 18-month process required countless back and forth between Briana Goff, director of the Institute for the Health and Security of Military Families at K-State, Art DeGroat, director of Military Affairs for K-State, and a number of military personnel and their families. Goode and his dance troop finalized the performance earlier this week before taking it to the stage in front of an invitation crowd.

"We had several conversations before it dawned on us that the perfect population that Joe [Goode] could reach out to was the military, because they deal with issues of resiliency every single day," Holmberg said.

Goff discussed the process and individuals' openness to share their thoughts.

"I've known some of these folks for years," Goff said. "I reached out to some of the people that I knew who had unique stories and who I thought would respond back. Some weren't comfortable sharing their stories, but some were very open."

Goff said those who shared their stories were made aware of the purpose of the performance, and that honesty in portrayal played a factor in their candor.

Goode was adamant about the necessity of portraying the stories as directly as possible through his group's mediums of modern dance, spoken word and music.

"If you made it up, it would be 'theatrical' in a very empty way, and that would not work," Goode said.

“The fact that it is real material from real people is what allows it to resonate, and what allows us to feel so invested in it as audience members or performers.”

This honesty is something that Hall found comfort in.

“I was kind of afraid, coming out of the interview, that they might ham it up a little bit, because I’ve been a part of so many things that others have done that to,” Hall said. “When I came and watched tonight it wasn’t that way. I was bawling.”

DeGroat, who has spent many years of his life dealing with and helping others deal with the idea of resiliency and its ongoing struggle, noted the idea’s realistic portrayal in the performance.

“They communicated the essence of the resilience challenge in military veterans in ways that mere words cannot express,” DeGroat said. “Resilience is seen as a process that has a successful conclusion, but as a human phenomenon I think that is not the case.”

DeGroat said that the performance’s message that resilience is a coping process and an ongoing struggle helped him, and could help many others dealing with the continuing struggles presented in their lives.