

Anything goes at festival

□ Women get chance to explore new artistic ground at Her-icane Caroline

By Jenny Gabruch
of The StarPhoenix

In a festival where the only rule is anything goes, Lia Pas feels right at home. The Saskatoon musician, writer and performer says the Women's Arts Festival is the perfect venue for exploring new ground.

"It's very open. You can do whatever you want, which is wonderful."

Pas composes and performs her own music, plays in the Saskatoon Symphony and just had her first chapbook of poetry published by Toronto-based Underwhich Editions. She's also a yoga instructor, and gives workshops on sound and movement.

Many of these elements come together in *The Descent of Inanna*, debuting next Thursday at Her-icane Caroline, 25th Street Theatre's third-annual Women's Arts Festival. The event, which this year celebrates women in history and honours critic, writer and book publisher Caroline Heath, begins Monday and runs to March 11 at St. John's Cathedral Hall.

Pas' performance piece fuses various disciplines — dance, theatre, costuming, music, poetry and slide projection — to bring an ancient Sumerian myth to life. She wrote the piece with dancer-choreographer Paulette Bibeau. They perform in a cast of eight, with director Beata Van Berkom at the helm.

"We were both really attracted to this myth."

It tells the story of Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth, who travels through seven gates leading to the underworld to confront her dark sister Ereshkigal. She experiences great fear and complete annihilation until an act of love saves her.

"It's kind of like an ancient crucifixion and resurrection."

The work is among a growing number of multi-disciplinary productions at the festival. *Splinters*, by Melanie Siebert, incorporates poetry, percussion and music. *On the Edge: Prairie Women* is a dance drama that uses slides projected on a giant movie-sized screen. Amy Stefanson's play *Not So Far Off* combines poetic monologues and live fiddling.

"We're seeing more and more of that, and I hope one of the reasons is that artists are networking and seeing each other's work," said Sharon Bakker, 25th Street's artistic director.



— SP Photo by Lucas Oleniuk

Paulette Bibeau (left) and Lia Pas in *The Descent of Inanna*, debuting at Her-icane Caroline

"We're seeing that at the Fringe as well. The forms are starting to change."

Bakker is also noticing more crossover with the Fringe, also produced by 25th Street.

"The Fringe and the Women's Festival are acting as stepping stones for each other. People see it as an opportunity to try things out."

The number of entries has grown significantly this year. More than 30 groups and individuals are presenting shows at the festival, a dozen more than last year. Participation in its literary series and visual arts program has also jumped.

Established and emerging artists work side-by-side to present works encompassing everything from music and dance to plays and poetry. Some are original pro-

ductions, others existing works. Besides performances there are workshops on drumming and movement and round-table sessions for artists to share information.

The festival's low-cost, low-risk environment aims to foster the development of new work and encourage a wide range of women's voices.

"The feedback last year was wonderful," said Pas.

"It's a supportive environment, which I really like and you meet all these neat women. A lot of my work is feminine-based anyway, so it's a really nice venue."

Festival-goers need a \$5 festival pass to purchase tickets to the individual shows. Tickets range from pay-what-you-can to \$5. They go on sale one hour before showtime. All box office receipts go di-

rectly to the artists.

Performances run Monday to Friday from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m.; Saturday from 1 p.m. to 11 p.m. and Sunday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Passes and programs are available during the festival and at 25th Street Theatre, 600-245 Third Ave. South. Call 664-2239.

BOX OFFICE

Women's Arts Festival
25th Street Theatre
March 5 to 11
St. John's Cathedral Hall
Call 664-2239