Doug Motel prepares for performance by opening his heart

Photo submitted

Doug Motel

By Roseann Langlois
OVN staff reporter

Does he practice "the method" to prepare for a solo play?

Does he do push-ups until he foams at the mouth, or chain-smoke Camels before a performance?

Doug Motel, who is currently starring in the solo play "Mind Salad" at Theater 150, has one thing he does before performing — he opens his heart.

"The audience doesn't give a crap how you do out there, as long as you love them," Motel said.

"It's an unseen thing," he added. "Love is something you get by giving it."

Motel has returned to Theater 150 for the second time. In 1997 he presented "Shiva Arms," also a solo play.

Motel, who wrote the series of monologues for both of the plays, said every character is an expression of himself.

"We all have a multi-personality disorder," Motel said, sitting in a chair next to the darkened stage. "When I'm writing, I tap into that part of my personality."

The characters can be viewed at Motel's Web site at dougmotel.com.

"Mind Salad" took Motel about nine months to write in what he described as an ever-changing process.

The first run of the play was far from glamorous, as Motel hit the "living room circuit," testing out the material for friends and family.

From there, many of his performances were for 12-step programs and centers for healing.

Mitch, the main character of "Mind Salad," is into drinking and drugs. Because of this, Motel said people in recovery can relate.

The premise of the play, Motel said, is one man's relationship with his negative ego.

"Without giving too much away, the play offers a personal solution to deal with those negative voices," Motel said.

"Mind Salad" contains 15 characters, creating a challenging task for even the most seasoned actor.

Motel approaches the task by focusing completely on the moment.

"I'm in and out of characters. If my mind wanders, I'm dead in the water," he said. "There's no one to pick up my lines."

The success of Motel's play, which has received accolades from Back Stage West, Variety and Drama-Logue, also represents a pivotal point in his career — when he was about to give up.

Motel, now 36, moved to New York City from New Jersey to begin a career in theater when he was 18. From there, Motel struggled.

In the past few years, his career has been gaining momentum, with performances off-Broadway, writing scripts for television and the acclaimed success of both "Shiva Arms" and "Mind Salad."

"I know now that I'm going to make it," Motel said, taking a deep breath and letting it out. "It's just a great feeling. Thank God."

Now, Motel said, he can focus on his main purpose: to tell stories from his heart.

For others struggling to succeed in any field, Motel said it's critical to let go of any personal timetable.

"You've got to surrender to life's plan," Motel said.

He realizes he wasn't successful at 18 because he wasn't ready.

"Success can make you feel worse if you have it before your time."

Mind Salad, directed by Michael Michetti, runs Fridays and Saturdays through Dec. 6. Showtime is at 8 p.m. Theater 150 is located at 918 E. Ojai Ave. Reservations are recommended.