



Canadian artist Michaele Jordana, who'll perform 'Storming Heaven' with Doug Pringle and Ricky Swede in Raleigh Sunday

In action for art, animals

By **MATTHEW DAVIS**
Correspondent

Michaele Jordana is an artist of provocative and sometimes confusing complexities.

She has both protested the slaughter of whales and subsisted on their meat. Animal rights is a consistent, powerful theme in her work, but she doesn't understand why someone would call her an activist. And while she considers herself a performance artist, the Toronto native has achieved fame in Canada as a painter, rock star and filmmaker.

Triangle audiences can get a glimpse of this swirl of personas Sunday when Ms. Jordana brings "Storming Heaven" — her 90 minute rock 'n' roll diatribe on mankind's inhumanity to animals — to N.C. State University's Stewart Theater as part of Triangle Animal Awareness 1988.

The show combines Ms. Jordana's talents in a collage of creative stimuli she calls a "macabre cabaret." The performance uses synthesised sounds, a three-piece rock band, dry ice, dance and slides of mutilated animals flashed on a screen in a highly theatrical approach to expressing the emotions of animal rights.

Asked where the inspiration for this performance originated, Ms. Jordana proved characteristically unpredictable.

"Tom Waits," she said, referring to the bluesy singer-songwriter known more for his slice-of-life ballads than his concern for animals. "He is one of my main theatrical inspirations. When I saw him perform, I was quite affected by his intensity and his ability to conjure up so many different images with his music."

The reference to Mr. Waits as an influence for a rock opera on animal rights seems to go with Ms. Jordana's territory. It speaks to how, through word and deed, she comes across as a dynamic presence that resists political, personal or artistic typecasting. Take, for example, her seemingly paradoxical experiences with whale hunting.

In the late '70s, she became well-known in Canadian art circles for her large, air-brushed canvases graphically depicting dead whales lying on the beach with their guts spilling onto the sand. But several years later, she and her collaborator-friend Doug Pringle went to the ice flows of Northern Canada and lived with the native Inuit, subsisting on the local diet: whale meat.

"I had to eat an animal that I really care for," said Ms. Jordana, 38. "It was definitely a confusing experience for me, but out there, the hunt for whales takes place with such reverence. It seemed acceptable. They perform a dance before the hunt and they would go to the edge of the ice flows and sing for the whales. I took photographs and later incorporated them into an exhibit. It was called 'Carnivore.'"

Ms. Jordana is quick to make a distinction between surviving on meat when there's nothing else to eat and the carnivorous habits of modern society. She is passionately vegetarian, calling the consumption of meat from factory farms "like eating poison."

Her opinions in other areas of animal rights liturgy are equally forceful. She is against all forms of laboratory testing and said she would feel uncomfortable being around someone wearing a leath-

er jacket. Ditto furs.

It is her ability to express these convictions artistically that has brought her to Triangle Animal Awareness. Yet she dismisses any attempt to portray her as an animal rights activist.

Taking a deep breath and choosing her words slowly, Ms. Jordana explained why she was so surprised when a Toronto critic referred to her as an "artist-activist."

"I have a strong link to animals and a sensitivity to their suffering, but I was really stunned when he called me an activist," she said. "To express what I want to say, I have to believe in the issue totally. But ultimately, my job as an artist is to feel and radiate emotion, not to be a politician or activist."

She said the desire to "feel and radiate emotion" inspired the staging of "Storming Heaven." The primary purpose of the show, she said, is not to encourage action on animal rights but to present animal rights as an emotional dialogue between herself and the audience.

"What I am doing with 'Storming Heaven' is to present emotions as images, whether those images are created by sound or lyric or slide projectors," she said. "In that sense I'm like Tom Waits. What I want more than anything is for people to feel. And I think when people feel the suffering that I am trying to communicate, then they'll naturally think, 'Let's do something about it.'"

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"Storming Heaven," featuring Michaele Jordana, Doug Pringle and Ricky Swede, Sunday, 8 p.m., Stewart Theater, NCSU. 737-3104.