



Dancing Perfectly Free



Performance Mix Festival at Joyce SoHo

April 19, 2010

Dianna David in *Letter to Michael*, photo by Luke Moloney

The New Dance Alliance (NDA) took over Joyce SoHo last week for its 24th annual Performance Mix Festival, which brought together over thirty dance, music, video, and interdisciplinary artists from the US and abroad. The festival, produced and curated by NDA Director Karen Bernard, supports emerging artists by providing them with performance opportunities, rehearsal space, and career development residencies. Thursday evening's lineup offered typical results of the festival format – some good, some bad – but it was an eclectic group of performers who showed an impressive range of styles and themes.

Lucie Vigneault and Frédéric Gravel of Montreal's Gravel Art Group (GAG) introduced themselves and proceeded to show the audience three dramatic pauses – all of which had been extracted from a piece called *Gravel Works*. Gravel matter-of-factly explained that they didn't have time to show the entire work since other artists were waiting to perform, so these pauses would have to suffice. These intriguing excerpts were just a slice of GAG, but enough to spark curiosity.

The other Canadian artist on the program, Dianna David of DubD Productions, presented *Letter to Michael* – yes, a tribute to the late king of pop. While this one-woman piece included some of Jackson's best-known moves from "Billie Jean" and "Thriller", the work also featured a narration by Jacob Richmond in the form of a letter, apologizing on behalf of all of Jackson's fans for driving him mentally insane, while also revealing the positive, chock-full-of-dance impact he had on David's childhood. Adding choreography to the narration, David proved to be an exceptionally talented dancer, mime, and actress, portraying all of the youthful angst of a child desperate to attend one of Jackson's concerts back in 1984. The work was humorous, touching, and an original way to honor a musical idol.



Alexandra Beller in *egg*, photo by Rachel Roberts

In an excerpt from *Detail of Double Escapement*, Chicago's Tif Bullard recited poetry and a song about a drowning girl while appearing to go through a Victorian mourning ritual. The piece was so internalized that it seemed self-indulgent, without showing an interest in conveying anything meaningful to the audience. Alexandra Beller's *egg*, however, conveyed a bit too much. The piece – a commentary on the struggles of balancing motherhood and artistic endeavors – seemed like a giant complaint and perhaps even an expression of regret. Beller started alone onstage holding an egg in her mouth, but as more people gradually entered and made demands of her – playing the role of students in the dance classes she teaches or a doctor preparing her for child-rearing – her stress level skyrocketed until she couldn't bear it. Navigating her way through a sea of eggs, Beller took a literal approach to dealing with a very common problem – balancing work and family.

New York-based performance artist Yozmit presented *Yozmit and Her Specimen*, a scattered, elusive duet that left me wondering: Is this a parody or not? The answer was unclear. Wearing shiny capes and helmets, Yozmit and Wendell Cooper – both androgynous figures – danced to a techno beat before shedding their capes and revealing futuristic suits and headpieces. Then they cooked spaghetti in a pot on stage and stared dramatically at the audience. We stared right back at them – partly confused, partly amused.