

DANCE | DANCE REVIEW

## Barely Moving, but Communicating Volumes

By ALASTAIR MACAULAY JUNE 12, 2014



Dana Michel Performance Mix Festival at HERE  
Credit Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

The Canadian performance artist Dana Michel is a real original, peculiar to the nth degree and remarkably compelling onstage. She scarcely dances; she scarcely speaks; her manner is oblique. It would be easy to make what she does sound ridiculous. Yet no sooner does she take the stage than she creates a complex world. She's doing a singular form of acting, and we're caught up by the strangeness of both her outward behavior and her character's private thoughts. For me and others, she was the one important discovery of the American Realness Festival at the Abrons Arts Center in January.

Now she's back in New York, performing an untitled 15-minute piece as part of a 90-minute anthology of dances and mixed-media pieces presented by New Dance Alliance's Performance Mix Festival.

The other five items on Tuesday's opening program were much easier to recognize as dancing, but what makes Ms. Michel remarkable is not the anti-dance aspect of her performing — she spends the first half of her piece slumped in a partly deflated black plastic armchair, digging among black plastic bags for food and household stuff — but the drama of her imagination.

In January, she made me think of that exceptional pair of performance artists Eiko and Koma in the way she sustains drama through a series of small and seemingly unimportant movements. That's still true. But her way of revealing a bizarre psychological interior also recalls Beckett dramas like "Happy Days," "Krapp's Last Tape," "Rockaby" and "Footfalls," and she has a Beckettian ability to disarm with humor.

Who is this woman? What is she doing, thinking, expressing? Performing solo (bare-breasted in the first half), she gives us a complex stream of consciousness in movement and words, but she — or rather the persona she presents — is limited, stunted, blocked. We're watching her at home in her lair, but even, or particularly, here, she can't marshal her thoughts. She's a figure of pathos, absurdity and occasional stubborn purpose.

The other pieces on Tuesday were unlike one another except in the pop-accessible blandness of their musical taste. Wendell Cooper's "Mx. Oops" was a raunchy display of vaguely transgressional sexiness. In Mei Yamanaka's "The Path of Wind," two look-alike young people partnered each another, mainly to waltz music, as if locked in symbiosis and conventionality. Christal Brown's "Miss Universe" was a modern-dance trio for two men and a woman, chiefly memorable for the passage when a lantern placed inside her white skirt made star patterns revolve around it. In "left:right:waterice," Nicole Bindler, Curt Haworth and Andy Hayleck evoked a phrase from E. F. Benson's "Lucia" novels: "calisthenics for those no longer young." All the performers were good movers; I'm sorry each piece amounted to so little.

Rather more engrossing were three animated films of dance movement, called collectively "Zala Moves," by Paloma Ayala, making dance continuity from line drawings of the dancer-choreographer Sasha Amaya. In one dance the viewpoint seemed to keep changing: were we seeing the top of the dancer's head because it was angled toward the audience or because we were seeing the dance from above? Another dance kept a constantly flickering life throughout the body even though the dancer, vertical, scarcely moved her feet. The sense of paradox within each film gave it charm and fun.

Performance Mix Festival continues through Sunday at Here, 145 Avenue of the Americas, at Spring Street, South Village; 212-352-3101, [Newdancealliance.org](http://Newdancealliance.org).