

# Brooklyn Daily Eagle

## The Varied Performances of the 2012 “Mix Festival”



Nami Yamamoto. Photo by Julien Jourdes

By Carrie Stern  
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New Dance Alliance’s annual Performance Mix Festival, now in its 26th year, comes with a warning label: Attend at your own risk.

I’m joking, of course, but the festival is known for presenting cutting-edge, no-holds-barred work, commonly with sexual content. It is remarkable, in a city where tiny cultural institutions come and go, that such a risk-taking organization has lasted this long.

Performance Mix 2012 hosted an international cast of 21 choreographers, during seven nights. Many would never have an opportunity to perform in New York without the festival;

kudos to Karen Bernard, New Dance Alliance’s founder and director, for creating this opportunity. It’s no easy task these days to bring foreign performers to the U.S., but the effort provides audiences the opportunity to see work grounded by the same post-modern concepts that influence many New York City choreographers.

Brooklyn choreographer Luciana Achugar, whose work I had never seen, drew me to the March 16 concert. The Uruguay-born Achugar has a reputation for work that challenges standard understandings of the body and of beauty. “FORM” (or “FEELingpleasure-satisfactioncelebrationholYFORM”) was no exception.

As it began, a bare leg peeked seductively from behind a curtain, reminiscent of a 1940s strip tease. The leg was followed by a naked body, with long hair streaming down, shielding the front and back of the figure — imagine a shapely “Cousin It” pin-up girl, of which there were four.

The dance was oddly, and appealingly, sparse. The performers shifted side to side, swaying their tresses. They turned from front to back and lifted their knees, their toes stroking the backs of their calves. They exchanged places, slowly coming forward and then retreating, disappearing behind the curtain to reappear from the other side. Occasionally there was a charming glimpse of pubic hair. It was peaceful, mysterious.

I was reminded of Paul Delvaux’s 1942 painting, “The Village of the Mermaids.” Though fully dressed and seated along a bare street, there is something in the mermaids’ slightly blank but intent look out of the canvas that is repeated in Achugar’s faceless women.

Four choreographers made up the balance of the evening. Nami Yamamoto’s “I am just swimming in a small pond that sometimes appears my mother’s eye” was a formal exploration of structure. A single phrase was repeated over and over with slight but meaningful deviations. Periodically, Yamamoto returned to the beginning of the sequence and started over. The dance spiraled in on itself, taking on new movements, as Yamamoto’s

energy became increasingly engaged; the structure began gaining meaning, evoking strong emotional reactions. Deceptively simple, her swimming was a joy to watch.

“White,” by Viennese choreographer Florentina Holzinger and Polish choreographer Marat Ziolk (performed only by Holzinger after Ziolk was denied a visa) was wonderfully inventive. Holzinger is disarmingly casual. At first, in her conversational style and slightly sardonic tone, she talks us through her visit to NYC — the visa process, Ziolk being left at home, boys she’s met... she likes New York. She’s a good storyteller, and the seeming low-energy delivery makes her vulnerable, one of us.

Part way through she began to talk about performing; she doesn’t want to dance anymore, and as she dances she mentions she wants to make movies. She asks if the audience wants to see a movie, and suddenly we’re in the heart of the performance. There are four “movie” options, each with a different mood, and she waits until someone finally realizes she wants the audience to shout out their choice.

The “movie” moves between description, commentary and action. Holzinger puts on a wig, cuts her hair, tells a story, dances. Dry, passionate, her movement comments on both movies and modern life, “meta,” as my father liked to say. Later, Ziolk was streamed in to join Holzinger in conversation, commenting on the evening and her friend.

Rebecca Patek’s “Untitled 2b” and Karol Tyminski’s “Crete for C” rounded out the evening. Both waded into sexual content combining story and sex acts. (Tyminski is also from Poland.)

Patek was delightful as a slightly distracted young woman, whose story of her recent life includes a hook-up with a stranger who left her without a follow-up phone number or even a name. At one point she asks for volunteers from the audience, and two ostensible (and apparently reluctant) volunteers from the audience held a bowl of water and a lit candle, after which a sensual dance — an extension of her story — ensued. In the version I saw, the work ends with Patek dipping the candle wick in the water, masturbating with the candle’s fat end while a poem is read until, on a signal, the bowl of water is poured over her head. (My companion that evening had seen an earlier version with a similar, but more dramatic ending.) The ending surprised me, not because of the act, but because it felt so unnecessary. Patek was a beautiful mover, and I was intently interested in where the dancing was taking her charming character. For me, this was a much richer source of story and performance than the graphic ending, which added little.

Tyminski, performing a piece inspired by a text by Haruki Murakami, was a gorgeous dancer, his intensity and the beauty of his movement holding the stage. He interspersed spoken text with relatively simple movement phrases, performing strictly along the horizontal axis of the stage. Like Yamamoto’s, the dance was an accumulation of movements and phrases that varied over time. Near the middle of the dance Tyminski broke this flow to simulate masturbation. The duration and intensity of this act in the middle of the spare elegant movement is shocking and, in that way of art, beautiful. Here the act, perhaps more intense because it was not actual, is an important part of the choreography, giving it meaning that it could not have otherwise.

Performance Mix is a tough set of acts to pull off. Bernard is to be congratulated for her willingness to keep wading in.