

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Bill Hebert

An "Open House" for Up-and-Comers

by Peter Price

One effect of the depth and vibrancy of the dance community in Philadelphia today is that venues like the Performance Garage are doing a good rental business. A lot of companies with a lot of dancers are in need of a Marley covered floor and a decent sound system in a warm room. The Performance Garage offers one of the best-equipped venues in Philadelphia's rehearsal rental market: its dance floor measures a spacious 38' wide by 30' deep, its sound system is perhaps the best of any dedicated dance space in town, and its industrial blowers can keep things downright toasty in the winter months despite its cavernous size.

The Performance Garage's "Open House," showcased work by six companies currently renting there. The program opened with *Untitled*, a double duet of female pairs in white men's dress shirts on folding chairs, by Tess Stumpf's Infatuation Dance Company. *Opened closed, Etc.* choreographed by Darcy Lyons working as DDL Dance Works, had a quirky energy that was a nice match for Austin Selden's joyfully open performance presence and lanky body. The first half of the program ended with *Water Dance* from Somatic Movers, choreographed by Kelly Adorno, necessitating an intermission mop up.

After the pause, perhaps the most choreographically accomplished work of the evening came from Alchemy Dance Company's Amy Harding. She presented two excerpts from *Rite of Passage*, a work performed in its entirety last April during the Philadelphia International Festival of the Arts, which Harding set to compelling original music by collaborating composer Jonathon Bowles. The second of the two excerpts, a trio entitled *Elemental Energies*, built slowly to a surprising level of intensity. Next up, RenZoku Dance Works' *Absence of fear* displayed engaging partnering and a varied movement vocabulary suggesting that choreographer Lauren Williams is also someone to keep an eye on. The show ended with Tangle Movement Arts' crowd pleasing *Half-life*, a display of aerial skills created collaboratively by Tangle's cast of eight.

The Performance Garage's "Open House," presented on a cold Friday the 13th evening, showcased the strength and diversity of the dancing happening at the space, and served as a window into the ecosystem of younger Philadelphia dance companies. The first thing

notable about this ecosystem is that there is no shortage of good dancers. Some standouts included Seldan, Somatic Movers' Megan Quinn, RenZoku Dance Works Karmen Fails and Lauren Williams, and Alchemy Dance Company's generally strong cast. None of the evening's many movers were out of place or ill-prepared.

Something else that grabbed my attention is that in these local conditions dance remains a very gendered undertaking. The two solo dances of the evening were performed by the only two male dancers, DDL Dance Works' aforementioned Seldan and Alchemy Dance Company's Kevan Sullivan. The classic dance archetypes of the solitary male dancer and the Bacchic chorus of young female dancers defined much of the evening. (Tangle Movement Arts, as a company dedicated to circus disciplines, was less likely to fall into these categories from their trapezes, aerial fabrics and ropes).

The overall impression of the evening was of companies testing out their choreographic chops using standard formats, rarely straying far from their own aesthetic paradigms. However, mixed bills like these play a useful function for younger companies, giving them stage time that they might not otherwise have, often, as in this case, performing for full, and very appreciative, houses. Each company has the added benefit of exposing their work to new audiences, and to their peers. With the rental roster at the Performance Garage expanding, but in a condition of uncertainty about its future, let's hope for additional installments of "Open House" to reveal emerging facets of this Philadelphia dance ecosystem.

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