

# thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Bill Hebert

## **ETC.'s March Mayhem Celebrates Philly's Diverse Dance Community**

**By Whitney Weinstein**

In joining drastically diverse works in one show, ETC. Performance Series exposes audiences and artists to work outside their ordinary theater-going routines and communities. The selection of artists: eclectic. For instance, a hip-hop/tap number preceded a contemporary routine accompanied by cello music. Later, raunchy, fish-netted “zombies” seized control of the space after a long-skirted trio gently manipulated a simple standing phrase. Reaching limbs and raising chests to the sky, the three rotated through different groupings. A life-size video gaming experience contrasted with other dance works that had elongated arabesques and triple pirouettes. Celebrating others' creativity drives the series to collective contribution and accomplishment.

The Philadelphia region contains a surplus of dance artists. Creative juices are overflowing, dancers can't stop moving, and rehearsal space is in high demand. ETC. Performance Series Director and Producer Charles Tyson, Jr. explained to the humbly-sized audience that, with heightened competition for the limelight, cheap theater rentals and performance opportunities are harder to come by, and choreographers get swept under the rug. This explains his inspiration for the program.

Characterized by the modest stage space of the Community Education Center, overlapping groups of friends and performers, and easygoing transitions between pieces, ETC. provides a venue where developing artists and curious audiences meet. Much of the bi-monthly show's charm lies in its informality. Now in its sixth season, ETC. empathizes with eager artists and offers an alternative outlet for choreographers to spin into the spotlight.

*Rock On*, from Andrea Mychaels Dance Project, featured uniformed school kids who daydreamed themselves into a band of air guitars and drums, their pony-stepping and head-banging infecting the classroom to the sounds of Deep Purple. *T.A.P The Art Profound* introduced Reggie “TapMan” Myers, whose tap dancing had spectators squirming in their seats with excitement. After a trick ending to

his basic hip hop routine, the "TapMan" surprised the audience with beats and intricate rhythms fast enough to provoke tossing off his suit jacket and tie. Lauren A. Williams' *I Love Playing With Walls* was a fierce lovers' chase that concluded as one dancer seductively slammed the other against the wall. *Critical Hit*, choreographed and performed by James Kiesel and Shoshanna Ruth, transported audiences into a video game where two "players" stumbled through a battle of predictable sword stabbing and an uncomfortable amount of slow motion action.

Articulating a bold statement in just a few minutes of movement is challenging. As I struggled to make sense of every artist's intention, I also tried to remember that the mostly local artists are elated for the simple fortune of performing. I looked to my neighbors to gauge their impressions. The audience: not as eclectic. At intermission, friends and parents conversed over mutual relations. "Outsiders" did not exist--all viewers seemed part of the same encouraging alliance.

Tyson presented his EclectiFunk company, Underground DanceWorks (UDW), multiple times. Most captivating was UDW member Lauren Sion's solo. Sion elegantly choreographed *The Lonely* with backbends and leg extensions which flowed seamlessly. Closing the show, *Check It!!!* struck with sassy style, as four women strutted between high kicks and flaunted their sexy, red lips, with seductive faces. The audience hollered encouragingly as the dancers undulated their curves. Energy exploded from the stage.

Up the creaky stairs and into a reception space that sometimes serves as a dance studio, warmth radiated. Part of the neighborhood for so long, the CEC serves as a much admired host to the dance community. Smiles, hugs, and congratulations filled the room. The Philly dance scene is always expanding and redefining "original," yet choreographers struggle for acknowledgement and appreciation. In events like ETC.'s March Mayhem, Philly's dance artists inspire, encourage, and contribute to each others' accomplishments. Regardless of the casualness of having a program as a ticket or lacking a curtain as the fourth wall, the community exemplified commitment and togetherness to triumphantly execute a performance.

ETC. Performance Series March Mayhem, Community Education Center, March 9-10, 2013.

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