

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Lauren Tuvell

Scratch That and Recreate an Arts Community

by Whitney Weinstein

When my gnocchi, derived from an old family recipe, arrived before the show at La Peg, I found what resembled a small piece of toast resting in a creamy sauce, lightly topped with grated cheese and scallions. The look induced second-thoughts, but the taste was exceptionally delectable. That Scratch Night at FringeArts, I was taking chances, and was well-rewarded.

FringeArts has become Philly's one-stop hot spot for dance and theater, post-performance events, French food (with outside seating when spring finally returns), and, of course, beer. With their newly established home-base opening last September, FringeArts welcomed La Peg Brasserie shortly thereafter. Originally a water pumping station, now overlooking Penn Landing's waterfront, the FringeArts building has retained its history while re-inventing its function. Here FringeArts is embracing the latest trends in Philly, from a beer garden to an admiration of process. FringeArts' series of First Monday Scratch Nights, showing works-in-progress of local creators, reflects a growing interest among artists of all genres in revealing art making process to audiences.

Megan Mazarick's dance was a beast-in-transformation affair, freezing and reversing Egypt-inspired phrases accompanied by dragon-like roars and monstrous video game sounds. Massimiliano Balduzzi created a language of his own, somehow still effectively communicating with the audience through his use of vocal inflection and intonation. *901 Nowhere Street*, created by Sam Tower & Ensemble, revealed clues to an old-time murder mystery to premiere in this year's Fringe Festival. A work-in-progress, a practice, and a preview, amongst two other experimental offerings: it was a ragbag Scratch package.

A member of the evening's cast, relaxing at the bar, proclaimed in response to a performer's stress, "It's just Scratch Night! All you really have to do is look pretty!" I gained insight into lives and personalities of artists in this informal pre-performance setting. What an interesting dynamic FringeArts has created. It's real, it's juicy, it's creative. FringeArts is bridging the gap between artists/performers and the public: eating together in the bar, viewing works before they officially hit the stage, seeing their engagement in life as one of us. And I caught the FringeArts impresario, Nick Stuccio, rushing, maybe as usual, through the restaurant before opening the evening's event.

The evening was a mix of the informal and the serious, starting with my bartender, a guy who had the aura of a hippie but the professional projection of a [Del Frisco's](#) employee. The works were supported by light and sound, but after each one, its dancers exited directly from the stage into the audience. There weren't any playbills, but the chatter from the full house revealed an extensive knowledge of the works presented. Under one roof, Philadelphians are gathering to connect, collaborate, and converse. Scratch Night merges curious dancers and curious viewers with a common interest in exploring the next generation of art.

Scratch Night, FringeArts, March 2, www.fringearts.com

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