

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Hallie Martenson

Starting from Scratch

by Lisa Kraus

Considering the word “scratch” in the name “Scratch Night,” there’s this definition: “assembled or made from whatever is available, and so unlikely to be of the highest quality.” So having scratch is starting at zero. With no expectation.

That term doesn’t apply so much to things around FringeArts anymore. The growth of the operation over twenty years is impressive, a model of how to start from scratch and develop something alive, vital, engaging, sexy, delicious, varied, and world-class. *Scratch Night* in the weeks leading up to September’s Festival is not exactly a no-expectations affair. Instead it’s a major marketing opportunity for groups performing in the Fringe, whose self-produced shows you may want to see after watching one of this summer’s three free, appetizing trailers, billed as “works in progress.”

Smartly presented, the snippets I saw from seven groups skipped performers’ bows to move the evening right along. It was “aerial night”; three of the acts involved trapeze or other suspended performing, beginning with Gunnar Montana’s *WROUGHTLAND*.

In it, a diamond-shaped structure lifted skyward, spinning, as performer Jessica Daley, clad in a black feathery bikini, stretched to her limits and wrapped herself around its struts. Feathers floated downward. We learned through announcements afterward that this is part of Montana’s rendition of Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Nightingale*. This nightingale’s longing has a sexual edge—an aching for release. It’s strong spectacle and made me curious about what Montana’s take will be on the other fairytales he’s chosen for his evening-length show.

Audience favorites included REV Theatre Company in *Death is a Cabaret, Ol’ Chum*. Dressed in steampunk ghoulish get-ups, this group sang to recorded piano, “When you want good lovin’, go and get the cemetery kind.” A cross-dressed top-hatted gent draped his hairy stockinged and gartered legs over a slightly discomfited audience member. I like imagining how this will translate to the group’s quite fitting venue – Laurel Hill Cemetery. As spooky fun, no doubt.

Another favorite was *Matador* by Ethos Physical Theatre Company. True to the announcer's description, it included "nunchuck fighting, aerial work, partner dancing." To the driving beat and repetitive Spanish lyrics of the popular song, *Tacata*, a superhero-matador in white bodysuit and red Mexican wrestler's mask, boots and cape, faced off with a black and red female "bull" whose skills included trapeze dancing.

Without the translations that the announcer said will be part of the full show of *Bodas de Sangre (Blood Wedding)* by The Duende Cycle, those of us without Spanish guessed at the drama unfolding out of a lively town square scene. Gradually a dozen or so performers filtered in to mill about, as a pair of gentlemen engaged in a game (dominoes?) and trios of dancers, first women and later men, enjoyed showing off their dance routines. Two of the men faced off in a knife fight at the culmination of this excerpt. It's based on the Lorca play, so refamiliarizing oneself with that might be in order before seeing the full work. The energy of the group was terrific and the delivery of a monologue by an impassioned village elder.

Three more works completed the show. In Tangle Movement Arts' *Surface Tension*, there was certainly a mysterious psychological tension between the two airborne performers, one on conventional trapeze and the other twining in and out of two fluid strands of purple fabric. *Human* by LeeAnn Mallorie, physicalized the emotional response to a spoken narrative about living with a difficult sibling. Mallorie's full work draws on many true stories, both her own and others'. Lastly in an excerpt of *Big Crunch*, "a sci-fi odyssey" by TOLVA/Sam Congdon, a cyborg-in-training (ostensibly male?) discovers the ecstasy of lipstick. This piece was particularly inventive, with its atmospheric music played live and Congdon employing hand gestures to effectively amplify spoken words before shifting into wooden (read repressed?) cyborg delivery.

The night continued with a \$5 "Artist's Meal" and a screening of Team Sunshine's 2014 Festival performance. And the Festival hasn't even begun yet!

Scratch Night, FringeArts, August 29. <http://fringearts.com/event/scratch-night-2/> Information on all upcoming performances is in the Fringe Festival Guide: <http://fringearts.com/all-presentations/festival-guide-online/>

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