

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo credit: Martha Stuckey

Jumpstarting new work with Live Arts Brewery

by Amelia Longo

I recently had the opportunity to tour the future home of the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and Philly Fringe. The former fire hydrant pumping station across from Race Street Pier is mammoth, and the Festivals' directors are gearing up to fill it with bigger offices, rehearsal space, a theatre, and even a restaurant. The move was partially spurred on by their desire to do more year-round programming, which they've begun with Scratch Night in their current Northern Liberties location. While they don't anticipate moving until fall 2013, they're jumpstarting this year-round approach with, well, Jumpstart, a mini-festival of finished work by local performers.

Craig Peterson, Director of the Live Arts Brewery (LAB) and Philly Fringe, describes Jumpstart as "completely different from Scratch," which allows artists to show works in progress, often very early on, in order to get audience feedback for development. (See my [recent story](#) on showcase series for more on Scratch Night). It's also different from the LAB, which allows artists space and time to research and develop work through residencies and public showings. Rather, Jumpstart solicited only finished work and is presenting only finished work.

Borrowing the idea from Fresh Tracks in New York, where he previously worked, Peterson put out a call to artists in March, and randomly selected thirty to audition. (Peterson gleefully relates his process of dumping all the applications on the floor, then calling in the rest of the staff to monitor the impartiality of his selections.) He also asked three anonymous community partners, Philadelphia organizations that work closely with young artists, to select an additional fourteen to throw into the mix. Peterson attributes to this process the eclectic group of artists who showed up before a panel of artists, arts professionals, and even one dedicated audience member. While he expected to see mostly dance due to the brief 15-minute time allotment, by the end of two and a half days and over forty auditions, Peterson saw an even mix of dance and theatre, with some surprises like comedy and poetry thrown in.

The six artists selected for the inaugural Jumpstart showcase are a mixed bag. Ilse Zoerb takes comic stabs at gender constructs. The

Naked Stark remembers a relative of Director Kathryn Stark in series of duets. Jamarr Hall portrays various characters in a play about a veteran and murderer. Sahar Javedani navigates her cultural identities through dance. The Brothers Beffa enact the true story of the bizarrely maimed Phineas Gage. And Jessica Morgan performs a dance “inspired by ghosts.”

Each artist was given a stipend and free rehearsal space, but Peterson sees even greater benefits. “It’s a way to flatten the whole hierarchy out, artist versus presenter . . . to make Live Arts an approachable organization,” he explains. Due to the plethora of performances happening almost every weekend, let alone during the Fringe Festival, it’s hard for a presenter like Live Arts to send staff to see everything, or even to be aware of it. Peterson notes that Jumpstart artist Jamarr Hall, a Philly Youth Poetry Movement member and self-described “poet, actor, director, singer, songwriter and comedian,” is a prime example of the type of artist he’d probably never have gotten to see otherwise. A lot of people who auditioned were Fringe artists aspiring to be Live Arts artists. The annual fall festival is actually composed of two festivals: Live Arts, shows curated by Producing Director Nick Stuccio and given full production support and artist fees, and Fringe, unfiltered self-produced works. Peterson expresses discomfort with the idea that Live Arts has any more value than Fringe, but acknowledges that there’s a certain perception of validity in being curated, and that there’s no “clear path” from Fringe to Live Arts. With a focus on presenting emerging artists via a random selection process, Jumpstart has the potential to bridge that gap.

In the end, Peterson sees Jumpstart as a way for the Festivals to create a sense of access for young artists, and a way to introduce audiences to the emergence of Live Arts’ year-round programming. It’s also, of course, a way for him to see some of the Fringe shows he’s been missing. Next week, you can too.

Jumpstart, Live Arts Studio, May 31-June 2, 7 pm. <http://www.livearts-fringe.org/jumpstart.cfm>

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