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Seen and Heard: It's Music to My Eyes

by Ellen Gerdes

Promising "potential for disaster and greatness," Blind Date: dance and music duos presented far more greatness than disaster. Thirdbird's first production even had the audience giggling with delight. Five pairs of musicians and dancers who had never performed together improvised with generosity and strong technique. Yet two duos stood out by forging connections far deeper than mere simultaneous improvisation.

Dancer Levi Gonzalez and musician Jesse Sparhawk opened the show with a less than memorable dialogue. While Sparhawk played a harp on its side, Gonzalez entered casually, seated cross-legged, and eventually crawled toward the harp like a soldier through the trenches. His movement's correspondence to the music seemed limited to squirms and supine wriggles, as if mimicking the vibrations of tuning forks played against the base of the harp.

Musing on the gains and losses of aging, dancer Raphael Xavier improvised sections of hip-hop and poetry. Ironically, he top-rocked, inverted, and spun on his head with great flexibility, strength, and youthfulness. Accompanying him, saxophonist Bobby Zankel stayed mostly in the background of the stage and the duet.

Self-proclaimed impressionist, Kyle Press, distracted from Annie Wilson's fluid movement by switching too often between instruments, overtones, and screams. Wilson led most movement daringly from her head, flinging her body through space, often to the edges of the stage. Once, she disappeared through an upstage door and reappeared through a second. Mouth open, she perched like a bird ready for flight to Press's final bird-calls.

Pianist Rosie Langabeer began with one clear, high tone before Beau Hancock appeared on a loft behind the stage. To a simple melody, he lusciously folded at his joints and extended through his tall frame while looking down at Langabeer. She gazed up at him,

as if seeing him through his office or apartment window. Suddenly, Hancock fell to the loft floor to what sounded like a crash of cymbals – the lower octaves of Langabeer's prepared piano. The difference between the prepared and classical piano sound accentuated the pair's distance in space. When the two finally met at the instrument, Hancock smiled and unbuttoned his shirt. The cacophony of sound directed Hancock; his body tossed around as if he were walking an uncontrollable dog. As Langabeer returned to playing the pure upper register, Hancock flirtatiously whispered to her (she laughed aloud!), careened back from the piano bench, then tenderly wrapped his arm around her.

Toshi Makihara and Nichole Canuso most impressively blurred the distinction between dancer and musician. Each played with a simple sequence of squats, arm gestures, and vocal exhalations while standing side-by-side. As they faced out to the audience with intent facial expressions, their timing created a competition to see who would get the last word. The evening ended with Canuso and Makihara drumming in the air to the sound of their own breath; the bodies' rhythm articulated the musicality in silence.

Thirdbird presented Seen and Heard, Blind Date: dance and music duos, Friday, October 7, 2011, 8pm, Christ Church Neighborhood House Theater. No further performances.

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