

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: JH Kertis

They Play, They Dance, They Improv!

by Lynn Matluck Brooks

Thirty shows of improvisational collaboration—that's something! Such is Mascher Space's H-O-T Series, curated by Flandrew Fleisenberg and Loren Groenendaal—a reminder that responsive, lively, daring dance and music can coexist in such continuous, evanescent conversation.

Graciously, the curators prepared the audience for the evening ahead by explaining its structure—how the musician-dancer pairs would be chosen, how long each would perform, how they'd overlap or not with the next pair, when pauses would occur, and how it would all wrap up. Sometimes, watching improvisatory works, I have felt hostage to performers' whims (some of those quite brutal). Knowing what lay ahead allowed me to relax into the unfolding of the whole through its delineated parts. Delightfully, each part yielded unique flavors and surprises.

Marie Brown (Philadelphia), dance, and Jesse Sparhawk (Philadelphia), harp: sensitive sagittals, quiet plucks and flicks. She listens. Does he watch?

Tom Swafford (New York), violin, and Katherine Kiefer Stark (Philadelphia), dance: playful teasing, touching, tickling. She crawls and dashes in and out of his reach. He's ready to laugh.

Alexander D'Agostino (Baltimore), dance, and Flandrew Fleisenberg (Philadelphia), percussion: quivers and crashes, coils and contortions, climbing and collapsing. It takes a really interesting mover to draw the eye from Fleisenberg's bizarre and delightful homespun percussion apparatus and maneuvers, but fast-twitching D'Agostino succeeded—sometimes a crazed and flapping chicken, others an eagle flying off a perch.

Christopher Brooks* (Lancaster, PA), violin, and Megan Mizanty (Central PA): conversing in signs, a dialog of entreaty, excitement, evasion. Hasty mudras and skitters on floor and strings—she seeks release from her introversion as he unfurls melodic entreaties to soothe and surround her.

Two large groupings move the evening toward orchestral closure. Pulling names from a hat, Fleisenberg assembles Brooks, Sparhawk, Brown, and Mizanty, adding Groenendaal for a new spice. All join in a romp through the stringy, swelling soundscape. The dancing trio stay close and intertwine, drawing the violinist toward them, then pulling the space back to the harpist. To conclude the evening, Swafford, Stark, D'Agostino and Fleisenberg take the floor, along with Connor Przybyszewski on trombone. The dancers spin and float; the musicians, too, explore the landscape, strewing pieces of the percussion set-up, along with the dismembered trombone, across the stage. It's a hilarious labyrinth of almost-misses, of sometimes-raucous, of finally quiet communication.

On to H-O-T number 31, marking H-O-T Series' three-year anniversary!

*Christopher Brooks is Lynn Brooks's husband.

H-O-T Series of Philadelphia, Mascher Space Cooperative, April 29, <https://www.facebook.com/events/584588008366658/>

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