

REVIEW

# Balancing words and movement

By TOM STRINI

Journal Sentinel dance critic

Dancers spoke the theory of dance as they danced it Thursday evening, when the Wild Space Dance Company opened its "Balancing Forces" at the Stiemke Theater. "You can take the pattern on the floor from anything, from the veins in your hands," they recited in an easy, conversational unison, even as they thrust and traveled in just those patterns.

After several rich variations on such themes, we discovered that they were quoting big-brained choreographer William Forsythe, down to the "uhs" and speech rhythms. Late in the 75-minute show, Forsythe's own taped voice, from his "Technologies for Improvisation" training video, coached the dancers through their paces. The interaction of word and deed has rarely been more clear, intensely engaging and dryly amusing. Anyone who thinks dance is a matter of brainless booty-shaking should get a load of this.

The Forsythe-based segments are the strongest and most original in this show, but attribution is difficult. Artistic director Debra Loewen contributed, but she also assembled contributions from co-choreographers Katie Sopoci, Dan Schuchart and Monica Rodero into a continuous stream. All of them danced in "Balancing Forces," along with dancer-contributors Michelle DiMeo, Jade Jablonski and Laura Murphy. Seth Warren-Crow played some music live on percussion and keyboards and wove songs by The Books, Matmos, Elvis Presley, Alison Kraus, Robert Plant and Over the Rhine into a single sonic fabric.

Rodero and Schuchart, a creative team apart from Wild Space, surely invented their own quirky takes on swing dance. They are adorable together in every way, all the more so because they make no effort to be adorable. They're usually deadpan and typically move in a gait that seems easy, loping and headed toward entropy, even when they're knotting and unknotting at a rapid pace.

These dancers are adept at fluid and expressive movement through the torso. Sopoci makes a specialty of such movement. I suspect that we have her to thank for intermittently flooding this show with a sinuous, sensual beauty that was most beautiful of all on Sopoci's own body.

"Balancing Forces" does go wrong now and then. It does not so much conclude as tumble to a stop. Some stretches of vague and almost generic modern dance lengthen the piece to no purpose. Sopoci's speech directly to the house is meant to provoke, but it's a thing that makes you go "huh?" And the aborted lesbian seduction from Sartre's "No Exit," spoken by two women struggling against rope harnesses, was heavy in the way of high-school experimental drama class.

But don't let the shortcomings deter you from attending the repeat performances, set for 8 tonight and Saturday. "Balancing Forces" tilts sharply to the good side.

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