

Wild Space disrobes ... well, sort of

by **Jason McDowell**

Published Dec. 1, 2006 at 9:12 a.m. Wild Space Dance Company is celebrating its 20th year together and what better way to do so than to take your clothes off! Well, that's not precisely what "Various States of Undress" -- which runs Dec. 1-2 at 8 p.m. -- is about, but it is certainly a part of it; don't worry, there's no nudity.

And while motion is a large part of what the company does, Wild Space dancers don't rely solely on movement to get their ideas across. Lights flex their brightness and shift their hues. Sound subtly explodes from the stage; sittingly silently in the dark the audience becomes more aware of the "pomp" of a bouncing balloon, or how stingingly accurate the clank of an empty beer can punctuates the depressing half-drunk realization that you've been thrown out of your girlfriend's house. There are spoken words, too. Some of them rhythmic poetry, others more lighthearted and jokey.

All of this combines to give the audience a multi-sensual and reasonably accessible entrance into the world of dance.

The night started off with the title piece, "Various States of Undress," in which a bookish narrator examined what it takes to write a novel. Certain pieces have to be there such as characters, locations or motivation. You need Johns, Marys, cities and villains. You need happiness and more importantly, conflict. Only with each piece of the puzzle perfectly in place will you end up with the finished work.

Similarly, the dancers shuffled themselves around the stage, interacting with the spoken words and their human counterparts, piecing themselves together, and, when everything feels right, interlocking.

The second piece, "One Time at Lunch," started with a cold blue light and dancers running embarrassedly across the stage in their underwear but as the light grew warmer, they bridged into a dance to an amusing country song celebrating their state of clotheslessness and what it takes to draw a horse.

The third piece, "Don't Wake the Wind," examined dream-like states. One dancer lamented to the other that he could not dream, but is seduced into a fitful sleep anyway. Once there he appeared to be controlled like a marionette on strings. As he passed deeper and deeper into sleep he gained

more control of himself. Then he was joined by the other dancer where he turned the dominant tables around to enjoy his magical (and eye-widening) abilities through the manipulation of his partner with a super-natural static cling.

Eventually the two coalesced, working together, complimenting each other movements, enjoying each others company in the singular dream state, swimming through a pool of balloons to the heavy drone of a Mum soundtrack. Suddenly the noise is silenced and the two descend and slowly crush a pile of paper sacks. Incredibly moving.

The final piece was "The Existential Crisis of the American Youth," or "I wish I was a cat," which followed the growth of attitude from an irreverent girl who's dream is to be a Toys 'R' Us Kid to a bold woman who half-heartedly attempts to get a job as a shoe sales clerk because she knows deep down that this is not for her. It was a beautiful marriage between choreography, music and poetry.

The strength and grace of the Wild Space dancers was amazing. Their movements were grand, but felt entirely natural and effortless. In the end, while the show sounds a bit taboo it is neither a gratuitous porn, nor is it a bunch of over-emoting fops in unitards. It is a sensual show that knows when it's funny. It takes strong turns and strong opinions.

This is the third time in three years that a Wild Space performance has been accompanied by a blizzard, but don't let that stop you from moving you and your friends and family Downtown to the Stiemke Theater.

Web address: <http://onmilwaukee.com/articles/wildspaceundress.html>