

Review: Danceworks celebrates 20 years with high-energy dancing

Elaine Schmidt, Special to the Journal Sentinel Published 9:58 a.m. CT Nov. 4, 2016 | Updated 7:54 p.m. CT Nov. 4, 2016



(Photo: Paul Ruffolo)

Members of the [Danceworks Performance Company](http://danceworksmke.org/performances/danceworks-performance-company/) (<http://danceworksmke.org/performances/danceworks-performance-company/>) kicked up their heels Thursday evening, quite literally, to celebrate the company's 20th birthday.

At Next Act Theatre, the company delivered a fresh, dynamic, multimedia evening of dance, music and film, mixing new pieces with favorites from previous seasons.

Company members Melissa Anderson, Alberto Cambra, Kim Johnson, Gina Laurenzi, Liz Licht and Christal Wagner were joined by artistic director Dani Kuepper and guest artists Desmond Cotton and Bobby Miles in a program ranging from bold solos to cohesive small ensembles and stage-filling, full-ensemble numbers.

The program opened with Sean Curran's rhythmically and visually compelling "Force of Circumstance" (2007), performed with tightly synced precision and decisive physical presence by Johnson, Kuepper, Laurenzi, Licht and Wagner.

Johnson and Miles gave a captivating performance of Kuepper's "Landing Is Hard" (2009), creating a tender, wistful connection throughout.

The premiere of Wagner's physical "Trying to Get Home" found dancers Anderson, Cambra, Cotton, Kuepper, Laurenzi and Licht, along with Wagner, in an angular, somehow-airy ensemble. They danced in front of a floor-to-ceiling projection of a film by Kym McDaniel, its shifting images of sky and urban Milwaukee lifting the performance out of the theater and into the realm of the imagination.

The program's second half opened with a mesmerizing performance of Emma Draves' "The Violet Hour," by Anderson, Johnson, Licht and Wagner. Set to modern music inspired by traditional Middle Eastern melodies and rhythms, the piece was flavored by stylized movements from traditional Middle Eastern dance.

The women brought graceful precision and a lovely straight-spined dignity to the fascinating piece, tugging at threads of an ancient past.

Kuepper took the stage alone with a bold, robust performance of Li Chiao-Ping's yearning "Refrain," danced to haunting vocal-piano music of Wagner.

Anderson, Cambra, Cotton, Kuepper, Laurenzi, Licht and Wagner wrapped up the program with an exhaustingly energetic performance of Kuepper's "The Stars Remembered What I Should Have Said" (2015), performed with a film by McDaniel. The delightfully random final bits of the piece brought the program to a rambunctious end.

Danceworks' "Dance In Take Out" program will be repeated at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 2:30 p.m. at Next Act Theatre, 255 S. Water St. For tickets, visit www.danceworksmke.org (<http://danceworksmke.org/>) or call (414) 277-8480.

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