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 Theatre Reviews

Snappy Dance Presents "String Beings"

by Sue Katz
EDGE Boston Contributor
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A tableaux from *Odd Egg Out*, one of the pieces being performed as part of the program at the Calderwood Pavilion through June 10.

The Snappy Dance Theater is throwing a 10th birthday celebration at The Calderwood Pavillion of the Boston Center for the Arts until June 10th. Despite being only one decade old, Snappy proves they've gained a rather magic maturity. The program is split in half: it opens with five glorious pieces from the past, followed by the world premiere of **String Beings**.

Since 1997, Snappy has been excitedly building to this level of performance. The innovative performance begins with "Four Fourths" and demonstrates the skein of combinations possible between two women and two men. They leap into each other's arms in a democracy of grace, irrespective of gender or size.

Limning Twilight brings Snappy founder and amazing artistic director Martha Mason together with Carey Foster in sea anemone-like movements to evocative music by Somei

Satoh. With bent bodies, soft legs and eerie lighting, the two women finally lift each other smoothly into the shadows.

Laugh-out-loud *Odd Egg Out* (from 1997) highlights the talented Tim Gallagher, Jeremy Towle and Martha Mason in a witty tangle of limbs. The two men embrace in an exquisite hug into the center of which Mason fails to insinuate herself. This ode to entanglement and exclusion, to moving music by Paredes and Respighi, draws the delighted audience in from the first weaving goose head a raised hand creates for us.

In *Au Lait* - more theater than dance - an apparently long-term couple (Mason and Rogerio Fernandes) haggle over the morning newspaper to the tunes of Billy Holliday's *Good Morning Heartache*. And bringing the show to the intermission, *Lumen* is a 2005 piece in which the remarkable Bonnie Duncan demonstrates mind-boggling levels of balance and leverage, perhaps honed in her studies of the trapeze. Working with the thankfully ubiquitous Tim Gallagher, a Maine native, she walks up his back, over his shoulder, and down his body to the floor. She hangs unaided along his back, holding herself only by her flexed feet. The word fulcrum was invented for these two.

The premiere of *String Beings* promises to "thread together computer science and classically-trained musicians via contemporary dance and theater." Using a complex set of screens and projectors, movement at the back of the stage is transformed into mesmerizing animations, overlaid with film of previous performances and accompanied by Boston's much-admired violinist Lucia Lin and electric guitarist Michael Bierylo. Lin even joins the dancers as she is lifted and carried while playing.

While this is a bold collaboration unlike anything the city has previously seen, *String Beings* would have benefited by some tighter editing and more actual

dance. As my companion said, "I understand the allure of merging technology, music and dance, but I longed for more pure expression of the latter."

Jurgen Weiss, Snappy's Executive Director (and Mason's partner), explained to Edge that String Beings is their most ambitious piece and, due to financial constraints, until they started performing it this week, they weren't sure themselves what it looked like. He is proud that with little support from the state or foundations of Massachusetts, their annual budget of \$350,000 puts them into the top 50 contemporary companies in America. Working against Boston's reputation for being "a non-dance location," Weiss told me, they decided to play to local strengths: classical music and technology.

Increasingly Boston audiences have become as relentlessly loyal to this local 10 year-old as Snappy has been to Boston. Martha Mason has utilized a collaborative approach to choreography that allows the dancers to push themselves physically beyond what any viewer could anticipate. The lifts are original and scarily daring; the integration of toys like duel rope harnesses is wonderfully playful; and the body wit ensures an exuberantly enjoyable birthday party.

The Calderwood Pavillion at the Boston Center for the Arts
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