

UW Dance explores the universe through movement during "PULSE: Intersections of Dance and Science"

by **KATIE REISER**
 SEPTEMBER 29, 2012



KAT CAMERON

Kate Corby's 'Catch'

The **UW Dance Department** presented *PULSE: Intersections of Dance and Science* Friday night as part of the **Wisconsin Science Festival**, a four-day celebration of science that spans 150 events. This free dance concert at **Lathrop Hall's Margaret H'Doubler Performance Space** featured works from visiting guest artists, faculty and students.

The program was peppered with three works from visiting "dancing scientists" **Karl Schaffer and Erik Stern**. This duo showed the playful and engaging side of science. Their first work, "Signs," looked at the codes we use when communicating, especially gestures and body language. They cleverly referenced universal signals like "check please" and some movements that I hope are not as universal, such as elements of a field-sobriety test.

In "Faux Paws," the duo had the audience perform the show's programs like instruments. The crowd was directed to rattle, flick and flop their programs back and forth. Then came a film. Shot from above, without edits, it showed four sets of hands performing elegant, complex and silly movements. It made me marvel at what a wonder we humans are: Our brains and hands can do so much.



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In their final piece, "Lost Soles," Schaffer and Stern tap-danced smoothly and talked to the audience about rhythms, numbers, and the feelings and words we associate with numbers. Again they directed the audience in a spontaneous concert, dividing the group into different beat-clapping sections. If I had known science and math could be so much fun, I would have paid more attention at school.

The program also included works by UW faculty members **Kate Corby** and **Li Chiao-Ping**. I've seen the works by both before, but these dances seemed quite different. In Corby's "Catch," an exploration of empathy and mirror neurons, student dancers in shredded white tunics formed a tight quartet to cross the stage at angles, then took off in a series of soaring leaps. At times, they stopped dancing, confronted the audience and then dissolved into hysterical laughter. It's as though the dancers were stripped bare without their steps to perform. Their exploration of contagion was especially thought-provoking. It was interesting to see how the dancers' laughter elicited laughter from certain audience members (some of the people sitting near me) and discomfort from others (that would be me).

Li's "Hado," a study on water, had a smaller cast than the original. It also seemed darker and sexier in tone. Li was a pleasure to watch even though she was on stage only fleetingly. Popping up from a prone position, she surprised the audience with her blend of fluidity and strength. Douglas Rosenberg's projected images magically transformed the floor into water-like ripples. Sarah Mitchell and Rachel Krinsky brought earthiness to the performance, while Hannah Wolf and Liz Sexe moved more lightly. Barbara and Donald MacCrimmon, two dancers from the community, provided a wave of calm.

"Of somatic algorithms [by name]," a solo choreographed and performed by **Henry Holmes**, a student majoring in dance and computer science, epitomized the UW's idea of the "thinking dancer." He danced bare-chested, often with his back turned to the audience, while text was projected onto a screen behind him. A good performer, Holmes seems stronger and even more confident this year. I found myself wanting to watch him instead of reading the text, which at times looked like the cryptic communication between Keanu Reeves and Laurence Fishburne in *The Matrix*.

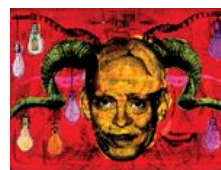
The performance closed with excerpts from "Palm Oil Rosary: ReCall" by professor **Chris Walker**. This piece explores the themes of repetition and religion. I am typically a big fan of Walker's work, which is often organically imbued with Afro-Caribbean elements. This piece felt a bit overwrought, perhaps because it's a portion of a larger work that was not seen in its entirety. The religious references seemed a little heavy-handed, except when soloist Leslie Thomas brought dance and spoken word together. It felt genuine when she described praying every day, then bent over and thrashed while releasing a torrent of "shame, a shame" over and over. Excellent drumming from a trio of percussionists and youthful exuberance from the cast made me feel sheepish about my quibbles.

Some pieces were more successful at showing the connections between dance and science, or at using science as an inspiration. But all were all thoughtful and well executed.



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