

'Dancenow/NYC' Opener Sets Historic Firehouse Ablaze



IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT

BY ELIZABETH ZIMMER

In a cab last Thursday at dusk—rushing between a panel at the Joyce Soho on the future of dance and the opening event of the “dancenow/NYC 2002” festival at the Firehouse Community Space—I was overcome with the passion for this town that grabs me at certain seasons, in certain lights. My last trip down lower Broadway at the magic hour happened while the neighborhood was still in the hands of the National Guard, a week after last September 11.

The attacks on the WTC cut short “dancenow”’s 2001 season. Grants from the New York Arts Recovery Fund and other donors have brought it back, bigger than ever. An alliance with a new not-for-profit organization, Ground Hero Kids, located the kickoff evening in a landmark 1895 firehouse. The former Engine Co. 31 at the corner of Lafayette and White is now a warren of bare spaces with cement floors; the grand renovation plan includes a state-of-the-art theater and screening room, but last week’s show unfolded as a peripatetic adventure, spectators following performers from gallery to gallery. Small works were danced in a lobby (see sidebar). Videos were screened and cake served in a back chamber.

F flirtatious waitresses dispensed cocktails, giving the entire event the ambience of a nightclub. Romy Reading wobbled about dramatically on tall Lucite spikes, in her own *They Still Don't Trust a Single Woman*: atmospheric, but I never got its point.

Many works on the tightly programmed evening, advertised as all new, were in fact excerpts from pieces going back as far as Zvi Gotheiner’s 1992 *Chairs*. Valerie Vann seemed oddly old-fashioned as she straddled a chair in a filmy blue dress to Rachmaninoff; much of the rest of the bill was set to percussive scores. Jeffrey Kazin sparkled on point in David Parker’s 1995 *Hind Legs*; what looked like stumbling or flailing revealed itself to be tightly



POINT TAKEN: JEFFREY KAZIN OF THE BANG GROUP, AT “DANCENOW” THROUGH SATURDAY

structured tap riffs. Another quiet interlude, Alexander Gish’s new *Landing Gear* to bits of Schubert and Beethoven, had Amber Sloan, Taryn Griggs, and Jennifer Uzzi throwing themselves into one another’s arms while providing their own lighting with flashlights—they set them up, they knocked them down. Two of the women trained their beams on a third. The trope is old in the downtown theater scene, but we don’t see it much in dance. Brian Brooks’s *Dance-O-Matic*, tight, robotic

choreography for Jo-anne Lee, Weena Pauly, and himself, melded perfectly with the club setting. And Nicholas Leichter offered a lovely low-tech solo from *Never End*, to live accompaniment by Alfredo Hidrovo, that moved through an intercultural lexicon of steps and gestures. Froot and Dorfman, recycling bits of last winter’s *Shtuck* that have ripened nicely, played the show out with klezmer riffs on soprano sax and accordion, perfectly bitter-sweet. Happy New Year, everybody. **V**

DANCENOW DOWNSTAIR

In their top-hats-and-tails number, *Species*, Chris Justin—grocery bags covering their heads, using simple thumbs-up gesture—created a virtuoso play of timing and cooperation to orchestral music by Edvard Grieg. Their thumbs darted back and forth like hitchhikers’, flexed and extended, and formed complex interlocking patterns with each other. At the end, the dexterous thumbs flew away like butterflies, allowing the rest of their fingers to unfurl and lift bags from their heads.

With great ease, tap dancer Barry Blumenfeld used every surface of the room to slide, stomp, and turn. His solo accompanied by trumpet player Jekabson alternated riffs and worked in unison. He utilized the intimate space well, punctuating his nimble dancing and sounds with small movements of quiet, staccato tapping.

David Neumann’s 1998 *It’s Gonna Rain*, to a notorious score by Steve Reich, took us on an epic journey. Neumann began by repeatedly shaking his head, building to a violent convulsing that ricocheted through his body. He then erupted in repetitive gestures that seemed to mirror the labor associated with food production, letting us feel the toil of working in and day out as well as something of the exuberance. Just when I thought he might expire, he began all over again, inventorying all the activity a worker might perform in a lifetime.

Sarah Browder directed the excellent, silent *Silent Motion Video* of Brian Brooks dancing through Manhattan and Williamsburg. Brooks, clad in dark sunglasses and a bright orange jumper, dances in the streets around Union Square. Filmed frame by frame like cartoon animation, he appears to glide over every surface. Hilariously, no one seems to notice him, except for one young girl. She walks right up to the curious creature and investigates him thoroughly. At the end, Brooks tries to move away, but she won’t let him. Eventually she begins mimicking his odd geometric movements—a serendipitous connection that creates a delightfully unexpected result. —Shanti Crawford