

The exclamation point of Dance Charlotte!

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Looking around Booth Playhouse last Saturday night, I couldn't help noticing how decisively the audience for **Dance Charlotte!** is skewing towards youth. That surely bodes well for the future of the artform in the Queen City at a time when attendance at homemade theater and dance events is drooping along with the local economy.

I only wish this last event in Charlotte Dance Festival 2008 had been a little more festive. Until we readjourned after intermission, Dance Charlotte! seemed to have forgotten its exclamation point. But not its artistry. The CDF's curtain-raiser; four excerpts from Erick Hawkins' *Greek Dreams, With Flute* (1973); drew some dreamy solo work from festival director Caroline Calouche in "nymph of grass of meadows" -- with flutist Jill O'Neill at stage right delivering a fine rendition of Debussy's familiar "Syrinx." A less familiar solo by Alan Hovhaness accompanied an ethereal pas de deux showcasing Sarah Emery (in fabulous form) and Andrew Carr in "plato's 2 are halves of 1."



But instead of picking up the pulse after this coolly classical opening; we lingered in the languor of Alice Howes' *Breathe, Relax, Renew: Exercises in Stress Reduction*; featuring the choreographer partnered with E.E. Balcos. More lower case -- and lower energy -- ensued with Greenboro-based Freedom Dances' presentation of Nicole Laliberte's decorous *gypsy amongst, strangers amidst*.

I ordered up some really high-octane coffee at intermission, fearing that Howes and her ilk might reduce my stress to the point of snoring. Happily, the choreography seemed to have taken a similar injection of caffeine. Caroline Calouche & Co. used the music of Radian as a launching pad for *At Odds*, an entertaining piece where Calouche and Cristina Catalina were mirror images of one another -- until the mirror broke.

Even more invigorating was the return of Balcos and his E.E. Motion in *Soul Intent*. The elegant concision of the Balcos style worked beautifully with the music of John Allemeier, but the energy of the choreography and the four dancers -- Balcos, Carr, Tai Dorn, and Audrey Ipapo -- was breathtaking. It's especially delightful to see the soaring lines, the vibrant energy and the utter fearlessness of Ipapo back on a Charlotte stage.

Van Howard Project from New York brought the evening to a close with an intriguing setting to a Brahms cello sonata, *Trio*. Stephanie Milling, one of the three choreographers who conceived this bagatelle, is currently on faculty at Winthrop U, explaining how Project and Festival found each other. Milling was onstage with co-choreographers Daniel Gwirtzman and Christian von Howard on Friday, but I was only mildly aggrieved when Felice Gabriel Romero replaced her on Saturday. Strong dancers, but I'd like to see them in stronger choreography.

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