

You gotta look fast to keep the Perks Dancers in sight

Every now and then, we happen on a dance program that just blows us away! Such a one was the Rebecca Stenn/Perks



Betty Ligon

Dance Music Theatre at the Chamizal Theater, presented by the city's Arts & Culture Department (hard not to call it ARD anymore) in its aptly named Discovery Series.

We didn't see Paco Peña's Flamenco Dancers, but Luis Gutierrez, A&CD Development Coordinator, said they had to turn away about 100 prospective ticket buyers when all 494 seats were filled. So we arrived early just in case. The Perks didn't sell out, but they came mighty close.

Because it was called a Dance Music Theatre, we figured it to be more than just a contemporary dance format. Man, was it ever! If you remember Pilobolus and Momix, (both dance companies were part of the Discovery Series in years past), ratchet up the Perks a couple notches and you have an aural/visual musical melange like you wouldn't believe. There are three dancers, besides Rebecca Stenn, and three musicians. They interact so seamlessly, one can lose track of who is the dancer and who is the musician. Even the stringed instruments are banged about in the knotty pieces in a manner that must give bass and cello players cold chills.

Stenn was a co-founder of Perks in 1995 after graduating from Juilliard. She also danced with Momix from 1989 to 1997 as it toured the world. In her visionary role as choreographer/dancer, Stenn is a miracle of precision, imagination and athleticism. Her works run the gamut from humor to seriousness, exploring rare depths of creative insight.

The opening piece, "Walt's Travels," offered a whimsical spoof by dancers Stenn, Michele de la Reza and Peter Kope with music by keyboardist David Eggar and bassist Jay Weissman (Stenn's husband). The dancers wore Chaplinesque blazers and

black bowlers as they took high jinks to the outer limits. Stenn returned as a beautiful "Bride" in long traditional wedding gown, while Weissman accompanied on a doll-sized keyboard.

Stenn, de la Reza, Eggar and Weissman demonstrated the ultimate in kinetic chemistry in "Fast Dance." Every movement was distilled in precise unison with equally assertive music to match. "The Carmen Suites," the blockbuster spoof on the opera, nailed all the familiar bits into a rollicking explosion of pure dance, while not forgetting the famous rose-in-teeth gimmick. Stenn is a daring and provocative choreographer who takes her own body to the limits that she expects from her dancers.

Afterward, we were able to meet the unaffected and affable Stenn and learned that she gave birth to a son just a month ago! He was safely tucked in at the Hotel Camino Real with a grandmother, Weissman's mother, who was baby-sitting!

Music loud and lovelly

Bracketing the dance program on Saturday was the El Paso Wind Symphony and Bruce Nehring Consort's annual Valentine program. The main attraction for us at the Wind Symphony was the chance to see Pam Turley's Encore Dance company, the special guests. Pam is another home grown talent we've watched develop since high school into a talented dance teacher and choreographer.

Our companions said the best thing about Ron Hufstader's Wind program was that it lasted only an hour and 15 minutes!

We found a best thing about the Consort's Valentine programs at First Baptist Church is its final Sunday afternoon performance. There were two evening concerts at which dinner was served, but the Sunday show is a boon for the elderly and disabled who find it difficult to get out at night. We took a couple of friends bordering on the above and they loved it! Coffee, tea and cookies at your table add to the informality and cozy atmosphere.

It's always a fun program, full



Peter Kope, Michele de la Reza, Rebecca Stenn & Trebien Pollard of the Rebecca Stenn/Perks Dance Music Theatre

photo courtesy City of El Paso Arts & Culture Department