

The Philadelphia Inquirer

173d Year, No. 147

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2001

www.philly.com

50 CENTS

Review *Dance*



The Perks Dance Music Theatre ends a three-day stay at the Annenberg Center tonight.

An evening of illusion, playfulness

By Miriam Seidel
FOR THE INQUIRER

A spirit of high playfulness lifts the dances of Rebecca Stenn's Perks Dance Music Theatre in its Dance Celebration program concluding tonight at the Annenberg Center. It's nice to see the growth in this high-energy group, which last performed here four years ago.

Stenn's Momix-trained sensibility shows in several short, sketchlike pieces, out of 10 in the program. In the solo "Iguana," Stenn herself alternates ticking head-turns and quicksilver motion, her arms wiggly as warmed-up Play-Doh. Tuesday night, a duet with Michele de la Reza and Peter Kope straining toward each other from opposite ends of the stage, hindered by two just-too-short bungee cords, offered some pointed moments but a somewhat narrow-focus navoff.

But Stenn's use of props and illusion — another part of the Momix/Pilobolus tradition — can be inspired. Her "Ocean" (from 1994) is still a stunner. Stenn seems to float, her curling body supported on blue waves created by a stage-wide billowing cloth. The other dancers rise under it to form the waves in a seductively effective dream image. Aspiration to a gravity-free state is also implied in "The Embrace," with de la Reza and Kope revolving gently on a discreetly small disc.

Two newer dances, longer and denser with incident, offered more complex flavors. The vaudevillian "Walt's Travels" set all the dancers (Kyle Abraham is the fourth) stepping out in Chaplinesque baggy suits. Live sound effects allowed their steps to resound with goofy echoes, or their lip-synched "voices" to sound like gurgling water, as they rolled, shook, and swam over one another.

"The Carmen Suites" offered the evening's big finish. Perks doesn't so much deconstruct the grand old opera as rip it to shreds with a puppylike enthusiasm, throwing fragments into the air right and left. Two musicians from the live, onstage band — bassist Jay Weissman and the amazing cellist David Eggar — joined directly in the mayhem, playing *Carmen's* standby themes while lying down or getting pulled over by dancers. Though their improvisational riffs may not have served all the works equally well, here the band (rounded out by drummer Tom Papadatos) was grafted daringly and successfully with the dancing members of the company.

Rebecca Stenn/Perks Dance Music Theatre performs at 7:30 tonight at the Harold Prince Theatre of the Annenberg Center, 3680 Walnut St. Tickets are \$28, discounts for seniors, students, groups. Information: 215-898-3900 or www.pennpresents.org.