

Week In Review

DANCE

Stenn and The Perks company offer unique blend of elements

BY JANET B. EIGNER
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An iguana, supple as rubber, darts and flicks in purple day-glow light, accompanied by droll, deep, syncopated licks on electric bass. A swimmer rises and backstrokes above a surging sea of purple silk.

These were the images conjured by the charismatic dancer Rebecca Stenn, who appeared last weekend at the Center of Contemporary Arts with The Perks dance company, her fine troupe of four dancers and four musicians.

After watching Stenn perform for the third time, I've come away exhilarated by her luxuriant command of modern dance.

The Perks is unique. The company borrows wit, gymnastics and illusionist techniques from the Pilibolus and MOMIX companies, but choreographer Stenn then adds her own verve, speed and lyricism to pieces she designs for her dancers (Sandy Chase, Erin Elliott, Trebien Pollard and herself).

Live music is the company's other innovation. It's rare for a touring company to travel with musicians, but this group co-creates each dance. On stage for all four COCA performances were Kenji Bunch, electric and acoustic violin; David Eggar, cello, keyboard and piano; Jay Weissman, electric base, and Jim Swarts, percussion.

Sunday's first matinee concert swarmed with an audience of children and their parents, entirely si-

lent for the dances and musical interludes.

Dancers and musicians took turns explaining each work. For an improvisation segment, kids were asked to suggest everyday situations. ("We got a speeding ticket on the way here." "We visited Santa Claus," "I fell down and cut myself.") The kids asked vivid questions at the performance conclusion: ("Have you ever been dropped?" "Do you ever get mad at each other?")

The Friday evening concert consisted of full-length works for an adult audience. For the Saturday and Sunday matinees geared to kids, The Perks offered six dances, some abbreviated from the adult program "for shorter attention spans."

In the dim purple light of "Iguana," Stenn reached flat locked hands overhead and slithered convincingly. She also nailed the four-footed, stiffly-shifting reptilian walk. Elliott and Stenn used fluid satin skirts as props in Walk This Way. The duet shuffled around the stage with material underfoot, then covered their heads with the bronze satin, and finally stood on stools to create the illusion they were twice as tall. Ocean's emcee asked for eight volunteer children to lift, flap and keep a current flowing across the magenta silk that spanned the stage.

"Trading Secrets" ended the concert with a sparkling, light con-



Rebecca Stenn, artistic director of The Perks

versation between the dancers and the musicians, now seated stage center. A sound, similar to the that of the Turtle Island String Quartet, blended airy jazz with classical music. Dancers skipped and twisted among the musicians.

The mood and rhythm shifted

from playful to a hot, intense repertoire. Dancers ran across the stage waves. Pollard carried Elliott above his head like a battering ram. To conclude, the four dancers clumped and simultaneously flicked their arms toward the lighted audience.