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The Scene

Modern dance troupe climbs to new heights

National reaches new audience

By KRISTEN POWELL on 3/27/08

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Media Credit: Courtesy of CREATIVEMOCO.COM
LADDER BY LADDER - Dancers push physical boundaries through experimental genre-mixing routines in "Taking Steps," a preview of ClancyWorks' and Dance Place's upcoming show "Spinning Webs." The dancers showcased their grace and strength through a breathtaking routine that incorporated a series of ladders. Pictured above, Mathew Heggem and Glenna Blessing perform an acrobatic and intensive representation of balancing work and family life.



Media Credit: Courtesy of CREATIVEMOCO.COM
STEP UP - Dance company ClancyWorks is renowned for its creative use of physical space and props. For its latest performance, dancers use ladders to challenge more traditional perceptions of the boundaries of dance.

It's unusual to see acrobatic feats of modern dance partnered with ladders in any setting. But it is perhaps more unusual to see those displays for free.

On Monday, ClancyWorks Dance Company presented "Taking Steps," selections from its impressive repertoire that incorporates the backgrounds of every member, at the Helen Hayes Gallery at National Theatre. A portion of the company displayed the influences of ballet, hip-hop and break dancing.

"Taking Steps" was a part of the National Theatre's "Monday Night at the National Program," which provides two shows every Monday in the winter and spring for no charge. Performances are at 6 and 7:30 p.m., and tickets are distributed a half-hour prior to show times.

The National Theatre offers performers like ClancyWorks opportunities to reach a more diverse audience through its "Monday Night at the National" performances. In addition to "Taking Steps," past performances have included the Columbia Flute Choir, taiko drumming and an homage to Ella Fitzgerald.

Particularly impressive in Monday's performance was the short piece "Noise," which was choreographed by ClancyWorks' artistic director Adrienne Clancy and former break dancer Wendell Cooper. Clancy and Mathew Heggem performed the piece. The piece was graceful yet combative, and both dancers showed astonishing strength and worked well with each other.

"Arctic Genesis," a piece choreographed by Heggem and performed by him and Asya Zlatina, featured music from Pat Benatar. According to Heggem's Web site, www.matheggem.com, the performance is a synthesis of improvisational exercises and a poem he developed about his animal spirit, "The White Bear." The result is deeply moving and complex.

The final selection performed by the company was "Taking Steps," a component of their upcoming show, "Spinning Webs." "Taking Steps" has dancers partner with ladders to reflect upon the challenges of balancing career and family life. ClancyWorks is known for its unusual pairings, and "Taking Steps" is a stellar

example. Dancers Heggem and Zlatina pushed the ladders to the structural limit while performing impressive balancing acts.

"Spinning Webs," ClancyWorks' flagship show for the season, will be performed April 12 at 8 p.m. and April 13 at 7 p.m. at Dance Place in Northeast D.C. It will feature "Spinning Webs" and "A2," both world premieres, as well as "Looking Back, Pushing Forward," which features members of the Dance Place Repertory Class. More information about "Spinning Webs" can be found at www.danceplace.org. More information about ClancyWorks can be found at its Web site, www.clancyworks.org.

The National Theatre will have two remaining performances in the series, including "The Singing Stockbroker's Razz-Ma-Tazz Review" this Monday and "The Old Landmark! An Evening of Gospel Music" on April 14.

Each summer, the National Theatre replaces the "Monday Night at the National" performances with a movie festival. Beginning on June 2, the National's Summer Cinema tackles the works of Bette Davis, starting with "Now Voyager." Movies begin at 7 p.m.

The National Theatre is located at 1321 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W. off the Metro Center Metro stop on the red, orange and blue lines. More information about the theater's free programs, as well as its regular performances, can be found on its Web site, www.nationaltheatre.org.