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Dance Review

Tap Universe Shrugs Off Any Notion of Borders

‘Rhythm in Motion,’ an Infectious Dance Celebration

By SIOBHAN BURKE - APRIL 11, 2014



Rhythm in Motion From left, Yoko Kono, Kaitlyn Way and Shamfa Tittle in a Dizzy Gillespie tribute piece at the 14th Street Y. Credit Paula Lobo for The New York Times

If you had to define tap dancing, “[Rhythm in Motion](#)” would be a difficult place to start. This celebration of (mostly) new tap choreography, presented by the American Tap Dance Foundation, shows that despite the common denominator of percussive feet, tap today defies easy categorization. Program B, seen on Thursday at the Theater at the 14th Street Y, exhibited the many functions of the form: tap as pure music, as political statement, as nonverbal narrative.

The evening's oldest and most traditional piece came first: Barbara Duffy's restaging of "Boom," by [Gregory Hines](#), who died in 2003. Three chipper members of the Tap City Youth Ensemble looked happy to be there, reinterpreting the rhythms of a master.

Notions of passing down a tradition spilled over into Brenda Bufalino's "Earth Water Spirit," with its multigenerational cast: the silver-clad and silver-haired [Ms. Bufalino](#), the younger Claudia Rahardjanoto and, the youngest, Alice Baum. Ms. Baum, strikingly adept for 12 (it can't hurt that Ms. Bufalino is her grandmother), had a dreamy, mischievous manner made even more endearing by her ragtag skirt-over-pants ensemble. A three-way conversation of the feet segued into a solo for Ms. Bufalino in which this venerable choreographer doubled as a conductor of the live band and an instrument within it.



Brenda Bufalino in "Earth Water Spirit." Credit Paula Lobo for The New York Times

The energy in the theater spiked with "The Countdown ... Ready Set Go," a defiant display of complexity and speed by Cartier Williams. Whether grazing the floor or attacking it, setting a simple beat or tearing it apart, he and his four dancers (three of them male, and the tough Megan Houlihan) were exceptional.

Michela Marino Lerman's "Stepping With 'The Kid' " paid glamorous homage to Betty Carter with the help of Carenee Wade's luscious vocals. In a heavier kind of tribute, Max Pollak dedicated his "Horon" to victims of state-sanctioned violence in Turkey, Syria and Ukraine. While noble in his intentions, he could have found subtler means of commenting on protest and resilience. After cleaning the fake blood from his mouth, he returned to sing the scat line for Susan Hebach's more effervescent "Jump-Did-Le-Ba," a nod to Dizzy Gillespie.

In "Fuga," Felipe Galganni juxtaposed the precision of tap with the curvaceousness of capoeira, the Brazilian martial art. As two crouching, cartwheeling capoeiristas and six tappers wove through one another to Baden Powell's "Berimbau," their musicality was contagious. If the pieces on this program had anything in common, it's that they made it hard to sit still in the audience.

"Rhythm in Motion" continues through Saturday at the Theater at the 14th Street Y, 344 East 14th Street, East Village; 646-230-9564, atdf.org.