

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Dances that plug in

Tangente focuses on the electronic body

Tangente, which shows more than 30 dance productions a year, employs neat tricks to make its programs more audience-friendly. It labels them.

There's the Moment/Homme series and its sister, Sa Geste, the Ascendance suite, the Série des Majeurs, which emphasizes the most experienced choreographers and even one called Le Corps Électronique, for choreographers who use electronics in their works.

The focus this weekend and next is on the electronic body.

Meant to attract techie spectators, the electronically enhanced dances are, fortunately for those of us who struggle with the most basic computer programs, not hands-on. Nope, we sit in our usual seats and watch electronic bodies do their thing in the black box.

Massimo Agostinelli's Oneiros, currently playing at Tangente, deals in dreams with three live dancers, a digitally edited video and 3-D animation. Starting Thursday, Isabelle Choinière's Communion takes over, with the soloist wired for sound and visuals that catapult the viewer into the brave new world of virtual reality.

I attended the dress rehearsal of Oneiros, a work that has been stewing in the choreographer's mind for years, since he met a healer who described to him a recurring dream he had as a child in South Africa. In it, the choreographer taps into memories of a tranquil-looking house on a hill.

STRONG TECHNIQUE

Agostinelli is a lyrical choreographer much enamoured of dancers with strong technique and good line. He has Maryse Carrier, Patrick Lamothe and Parise Mongrain swirl, stretch and leap in front of a screen on which he projects surreal and illogical dream sequences.

A bed flies, a house deconstructs, a woman in black stockings races about in terror, crayon-coloured balloons float and a blue sky is strewn with fluffy pink clouds. Umbrellas dance on the screen while on stage, with similar dream-like quixotic reasoning, a woman in a huge skirt smooths all stress away with slow hip rotations.

There's a non-electronic work by the 39-year-old choreographer on the same program, offering a chance to see another dimension of Agostinelli. Marguerite is a five-minute miracle created for dancer Sylvain Brochu. While this is a purely traditional solo with roots in an old-world theatre style known as bouffon, it is noteworthy for its brilliant interpretation and the silly humour and smiles it engenders. Agostinelli says he loves to laugh, and in Marguerite he and Brochu share this pleasure completely.

DANCE LINDE HOWE-BECK

BETTER KNOWN AS TEACHER

Agostinelli is a multi-faceted talent who is better known as a teacher than for his infrequent choreographies and cinematographic and videographic projects produced at home and abroad.

For a decade he has taught at Les Ateliers de Danse Moderne de Montréal, a training ground for professional contemporary dancers. He teaches his repertoire as well as bouffon, a grotesque outgrowth of commedia dell'arte theatre that he has adapted for dancers.

"It's an in-your-face, confrontational style that forces students to play against their public," he explained. "Bouffon is parody - it makes fun of taboos and makes people laugh at themselves."

There's no humour or laughter of any kind in Communion, an extraordinary multimedia creation by Isabelle Choinière, Jimmy Lakatos, Alexandre Burton and Michael David Smith. Working in dance, video, sound and computer graphics, they have created a work they say is "electronic scarification, an alteration of synthetic skins resembling an opening toward another tactility."

Performed by Choinière, Communion returns for the third time to Mon-

tréal after touring the world for a couple of seasons, scoring high marks at international video and electronics festivals. A trail of postcards chronicles Communion's successes. Most recently, the show played in Brazil, Argentina, Holland and the U.S.

SEDUCTIVE FUSION

Communion and its predecessor, Le Partage des Peaux, introduced me to this seductive fusion of dance and technology. I marvelled at the compact dancer's ability to raise issues of limitations of skin and soul, individualism and collectivism, internal and external. She's a time-walker, crossing boundaries between past and future with only a pause in present.

With minimal visual equipment - she wears all sorts of sensors and monitors that trigger a myriad of effects - Communion celebrates the body actually and virtually. Choinière's basic humanity is called into question as we watch her video image and her computer-animated self merge and divide in shimmery blue waves. She is both more - and less - than human. Her essence appears to grow and then is reduced to the point of disappearance. It's scary and wonderful and certainly as new world as I've ever dared to view.

✦ Massimo Agostinelli's Oneiros and Marguerite are performed tonight at 8:30 p.m. and tomorrow at 7:30 p.m. in Le Corps Électronique at Tangente, 840 Cherrier St. E. Isabelle Choinière brings back Communion next Thursday through May 31 at 8:30 and June 1 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$15 and \$12. For reservations, call 525-1500.

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