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Dance Chicago's effective smorgasbord

By Sid Smith, Special to the Tribune

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The virtue of Dance Chicago is not so much that it offers something *for* everyone, but seems, in its wide swathe, to feature something just about *by* everyone.

This bedrock, rag-tag and inconsistent festival is always a far-reaching potpourri showing off diverse elements from our varied community. Every style and mode get a nod, from quirky experimentalists to flashy ballroom acrobats.

Credit artistic director John Schmitz, whose penchant for modern dance never stopped him from including ballroom pizzazz in the mix years before the trend reignited on television. Schmitz puts together participants as if concocting a global menu, tossing in the well-established, the up-and-maybe-coming, the aging pro, aspiring students, hip hop and folk dance.

Wednesday's opening at Stage 773 included Billy Siegenfeld and his Jump Rhythm Jazz Project, often stars of festivals past, back with his 2010 "Why Gershwin?" It's an intriguing, zany play-let harkening back to the novelty and rhythmic vocals of his earliest pieces, this one taming a man's man (Siegenfeld) steeped in James Brown, seduced by his lady and a chorus of Gershwin-crazed loonies. Rising choreographer Autumn Eckman displays an affinity for the same pop elements in her "A Little Moonlight," an entertaining, deliciously crafted mix of jazz and soft ballet, danced Wednesday by Giordano II's Brianna Pazos and Devin Buchanan, a specialist at sparkly leaps.

Eckman premiered a promising but flawed work with NoMi LaMad Dance Inc., "Mirrors Are Dangerous," edgy in style though not always compelling in dramatic evolution. Outside, the Renegade Dance Architects entertained on the sidewalk before the concert, while likable contemporary works by Eddy Ocampo and Wilfredo Rivera played on the same stage with a Gothic anti-romance from the talented students of Curie Metro High School; salsa ballroom fireworks from the daredevil team of Brandon and Serena; gymnastic romp and elasticity from AMEBA; and a festive, foot-stomping finale from the Mexican Dance Ensemble.

Upcoming events include samples of ballroom, jazz and hip hop in Jazz Cabarets Saturday and Nov. 14; New Moves programs of young dancers and choreographers Thursday and Nov. 18; urban movement performers and troupes Nov. 19; various performance innovators and newcomers in a Nov. 20 Dance Carnival; and showcases of new work Nov. 21.

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Dance Chicago 2010

A festival of various programs, troupes and dancers

When: Various times and dates through Nov. 21

Where: Stage 773, 1225 W. Belmont Ave.

Price: \$27; 773-327-5252 or dancechicago.com

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