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Dance Chicago Opening Night: Live review

Posted in [Around Town](#), [Dance](#) by [Zachary Whittenburg](#) on November 4th, 2010 at 2:49 pm



Jump Rhythm Jazz Project in "WHY GERSHWIN?" Photo: John DeSalvo

I'll surprise no one by admitting that contemporary jazz, the predominating style of dance seen on opening night of [Dance Chicago](#), a [three-week buffet](#) at Stage 773 through November 21, is not exactly my jam. Artistic director of [Chicago Dance Crash](#) Mark Hackman even ambushed me with a Flip as I crossed the lobby, jokingly trying to get me to say something nasty on camera about one of the participating companies. I am not a passionate champion of this approach to concert dance, and it doesn't matter. Plenty of Chicagoans love performing and watching it. That's awesome. It should also surprise no one that I support enthusiasm about and participation in the local dance scene one hundred and ten percent.

Dance Chicago founder, artistic director and curator John Schmitz has produced this behemoth annually since 1994 and knows that concision is key. Eleven companies presented eleven works, yet only one lasted more than about five minutes, and all were high-energy. There were four evenly spaced departures from contemporary jazz to break up the sameness: Ballroom dance (top 10-ranked Latin junior champs [Brandon Segovia and Serena Pav](#)), zany and vocal dance-theater ([Jump Rhythm Jazz Project](#)), improvised breaking (Crash regulars, with guests from [Ronn Stewart & Dancers](#)) and folk ([Mexican Dance Ensemble](#)). A fifth company, [AMEBA Acrobatic & Aerial Dance](#), was half-with the other six and half into gymnastics.

This isn't to say that the remainder of the lineup was interchangeable; each group put its own spin on the genre. [Cerqua Rivera Dance Theatre](#) in director Wilfredo Rivera's *Estudios* was sunnily Latin, especially in the hips, while the trio from [Forum Jazz Dance Theatre](#) who danced Eddy Ocampo's *Cho* were twitchier and garnished their *port de bras* with *mudrás*. The precociously powerful members of [Extensions Dance Company](#) interpreted Ólafur Arnalds's moody soundscape as structure in Lizzie MacKenzie's *Rain*; [NoMi LaMad](#) dancers gave cellist [Joan Jeanrenaud](#)'s music a nice rolling momentum in choreography by Autumn Eckman.



Extensions Dance Company in "Rain." Photo: John DeSalvo

But the boundaries of the world these pieces (and one more by Melinda Wilson for [Curie Metro High School](#) students) inhabit are shared, fixed and not far from its center. Music is the omnipresent armature and there's an action to go with each beat. (Kudos to Eckman for

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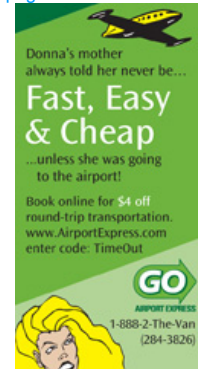
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choosing Radiohead's "15 Step" with its tricky 5/4 time signature.) Faces are always "on," legs fly high, and the emphasis is more on attacking each movement's initiation than modulating what happens as a result. There were some incredibly talented kids on stage; Curie's Stanley Glover, born to dance, is 16 and well on his way to being a very big deal.

Should you expect Dance Chicago's umpteen mixed bills and themed programs to represent the finest work being done in this area, and dance in Chicago in general? No. Is it important anyway, positive in spirit and a chance for hundreds of young artists to be seen by an appreciative crowd and hone their stage chops? Absolutely, and that's a beautiful thing.

Dance Chicago continues through November 21 at Stage 773. Visit dancechicago.com for up-to-date information, and timeoutchicago.com/dance for complete listings.

Tags: AMEBA Acrobatic & Aerial Dance, Autumn Eckman, Ólafur Arnalds, Brandon Segovia, Cerqua Rivera Dance Theatre, Dance Chicago, Eddy Ocampo, Extensions Dance Company, Forum Jazz Dance Theatre, Joan Jeanrenaud, John Schmitz, Jump Rhythm Jazz Project, Mark Hackman, Mexican Dance Ensemble, NoMi LaMad Dance, Ronn Stewart, Serena Pav, Stage 773, Stanley Glover, Wilfredo Rivera

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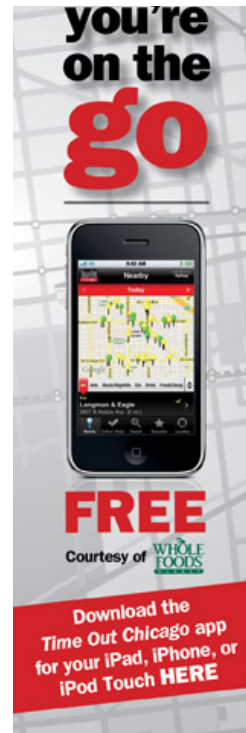
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