

The Philadelphia Inquirer

philly.com

163rd Year, No. 1 • City & Suburbs

Tuesday, June 1, 2010 ★ Locally Owned & Independent Since 2006 ★ 75 cents

\$1 in some locations outside the metro area

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THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

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Review *Dance*

Hot and cold at the Painted Bride

By Marilyn Jackson
FOR THE INQUIRER

In the Philadelphia/Washington D.C. Exchange concert over the weekend, Anne-Marie Mulgrew and Dancers Company joined with D.C.'s Human Landscape Dance, each presenting two works representative of their companies. Both have a reputation for working in site-specific arenas, each well-known for using parks, walls, even city sidewalks to create a mise-en-scene. In this case they brought their works to the Painted Bride stage, with some mixed results.

Human Landscape chose two works that translated well to the indoors. Amanda Abrams, Alexander Short, and company founder Malcolm Shute performed in each, opening the show with *January Night*. A world premiere, Shute's soundscape of creaking ice and melting snow recalled our recent brittle and blizzardy winter. Drifting over one another on a rep-

resentation of a snowbank, the three pajama-clad friends passed their time thwarting the cold and fending off the boredom of being snowed in.

More challenging, *Closet Dances* also employed the dance style known as contact improvisation to create the look of the three individuals locked in a "walk-in closet" from which they try to escape — but not without getting in one another's way.

From my perspective, contact improv choreography can be too undifferentiated. But when it is pitch-perfect and an element of humor and suspense is subtly added, as it was here, it succeeds. To Shute's industrial score, the three try squeezing out of the closet door (the stage's sole prop). Only Abrams squeaks through, leaving the men gawking in disbelief.

Mulgrew and her crew premiered *Burn*, her meditation on her bout with radiation therapy. Mulgrew always

picks good music for her pieces but doesn't always use them to her best advantage.

Her five dancers canter about the stage to Bach; she runs around the stage to a metronome, stops, and pulls her long ponytail up like a noose.

The trio dancing to the music of Dolphina looked vaguely Indian, and Mulgrew inserted her wit by choreographing Western modern dance idioms embellished with Eastern gestures. But instead of the triumphant fusion of movement, rhythm, and life it could have been, her contrapuntal choreography to a section of Philip Glass' *Agua de Amazonia* fizzled out disappointingly.

Closing the show, *The Big Dance 2005* had Mulgrew tortuously tugging along a 60-foot bolt of stretchy red jersey. Would that she had not added the final upbeat section that erased the dramatic Nike of Samothrace-like image she created.

Alexander Short and Amanda Abrams performed in two Human Landscape works "January Night" and "Closet Dances."

JENNIFER MUELLER

