

Come Together Dance Festival 2015 Convenes

in [Lew's Danceland](#) / by [Lewis Whittington](#) / on July 25, 2015 at 3:36 pm /

By Lewis Whittington for The Dance Journal

The diversity of the sold-out audience buzzing in the lobby the Suzanne Roberts Theatre for the 3rd Come Together festival is emblematic of the festival's mission not only bring to bring together dance company diversity, but to attract crossover audiences in every direction—Modern dance fans who are clueless about the latest innovations in tap, under represented genres on the same stage as headliners, and so on. Festival directors Roni and Alon Koresh presenting 33 dance companies, in its third outing, is, indeed, a formidable undertaking.

In the Roberts theater lobby, Roni in an elegant black suit stood on the gallery steps congratulating the dance companies and the crowd and launched the 2015 festival with a toast. The first night program had a measure of minor technical glitches and some of the companies could have looked sharper, but by night two, CT 2015 was humming along and the collective energy of the deep field of Philly dance and visiting artists creating a palpable festival atmosphere.

July 22 opening program

Inside the theater a late **curtain came up on Brian Sanders' JUNK 's 'American Standard' a rustic tableau complete with haystacks and a pommel horse apparatus used by dancer Tedd Fastcher for rawhide mounts and vaults.** Two male-female couples have curiously psychological and mysteriously sensual rolls in the hay. Tanai Jones and Regan Jackson make their own hoedown in mucklucks with some two-stepping rubber tapdancing. The barnburner finish has the dancers, their thumbs hitched to their daisy dukes in an acrobatic dance off featuring Sanders' knarly aerials.

Chisena Danza was next with "Black Lotus" a solo piece by dancer- choreographer Melissa Chesena. Chesena kneels in a column of light, her naked back oscillating. She slowly rises and reveals a velvet skirt and blue silk lining flowing underneath. Chisena's performs multi-vernacular solo all while moving the fabrics ala Graham to stunning visual effect. Dancing to somber piano/cello music by Jonathan Cannon, Chesena's movement has an improvisation feel, as well as structured polish.

Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers performed excerpts of 'HOME/ S. 9th St' in development this past year, is part of Lin's choreographic exploration of Asian classicism and modern movement. The piece revolves around a central duet danced by WeiWei Ma and Mo Liu captivating dancing Lin's gestural narrative and lyrical expression. The music shifts to something more driving and the ensemble is in formation pulsing together in lunging moves laced with martial arts poses and cross-genre balletics. As with previous previews of HOME, this excerpt makes you want to see the whole piece in context.

Spectrum Dance Theatre + Donald Byrd – Choreographer Byrd, in collaboration with dancers Jeremy Cline and Blair Elloit’s ‘Disintegrating Loop’ is a challenging scenario of a troubled couple, set to a pulsing sonar wave soundscape. When Cline and Elliot move through a pool of light they swim the breaststroke beautifully, but as soon as they exit, they convulse in an electroshock. Predictably, things get physically testy between them, they part and he sulks spastically on one side of the stage and she on the other on her back, playing with her feet. More swimming, more convulsive, a few lifts. The dancers have such presence that you want to see them break out of this choreographic haze. Even as this piece moves to beautiful imagery in its resolve, it has the feel of a studio exercise that needed another draft. Clear!



Philadanco dazzled the crowd with choreographer Christopher Huggins’ Latched, set to music by Sohn with lyrics describing the right moment for couples to break from an unhealthy relationship. Signature propulsive drive by Huggins, that just keeps revving up on Danco dancers. Six dancers in black unitards flying through Huggins double tempo phrases, with flash lifts (a stunner by Rosita Adamo and Adryan Moorefield) and mach speed turns. This performance could have looked sharper, less rote in key moments, but the dancers attack was there. Huggins slows them up for sultry flamenco group march that is as fiery as those pyrotechnic moves.

Raphael Xavier has built a following in the festival and his ‘Point of Interest’ opened the second half and it is a good sequel to his piece last year as sort of the Ages of the street dancing man. Xavier indicating he is trying to keep pace with his three younger dancers. Even with some snarky bows to age, he was right with them in the tight unison work. Xavier’s witty mis-en-scenes included a hip-hop warm-up with basic steps shown in adagio ala ballet class. Then the hip-hop dance down among the quartet with Macca Malik taking it with her dervish spider spins on her palms, punctuated with snide runway poses broke the audience up.

Koresh Dance Company showed sections of their recent hit ‘Aftershock’ with their newest dancer Vanessa Quinto, just with the company for two weeks in the center of the comic section ‘Gare Des Etreintes’, with the dancers lined up ala A Chorus Line, mugging to the audience and breaking out in Chaplinesque gestures. In a breakout performance Quinto is most impressive as the one in the middle around a group of dancers in razor sharp unison phrasing next to Robert Tyler. The ensemble section is industrial Koresh and as earnestly danced as it is, keeps hitting the same dissonant chord.

July 23

All systems were more than go on the second night programming with 10 companies conspiring for what proved to be a magical night of dance starting with the performance by “Fula Fare” by **Kule Mele African Dance and Drum Ensemble**. Choreographer Yousouff Koumbassa is stunning in its authenticity of the traditional Guinean dance celebrating the birth of a child. Four women in floral dresses set out the communal patterns and the four men set the rhythm patterns on a slate of percussion instruments. The joyous movement flows in symbolic patterns then frame two of the drummer who fly into a dance off of spins, tumbles, daredevilry and some prototype hip-hop feats. the audience exploded with approval.

AJGarcia-Rameau danced to her own piece “When She Came Back” a silky solo set to music by Max Richter. Garcia has beautiful carriage and unfussy point work has an expressive lyricism that speaks to contemporary audiences.

Alchemy Dance Company “Playground’ choreographed by Amy Harding has seven women in men’s shirts for her piece “Playground” but the dancers didn’t seem too happy here. They laugh at one dancer’s interpretive dance, cluster and stalk around with their arms raised. The self-consciousness of the piece starts to cloy and just when Harding starts to move it choreographically, recess is over.

The Clutch Collective is Kenneth Allen Thomas' dance memoir 'Allen vs. 21', reflecting on his experience as a 21-year old new father. Thomas dances to voice over narration that tells his story of unexpected parenthood and the responsibility of raising his child, which he later finds out is not his. Thomas' uses fluid break robotics and fluid micro-moves that build a poetic intimacy and compelling dance theater..

Sakshi Production danced 'Ravana's Homage' choreographed by donia salem and Nandina Sikand who are joined by Nyasa Cusmai for the dance trio telling a mystical tale of Shiva Goddess of Dance. The colorful fabrics and beaded belts evoking a Indian iconography, traditional classicism with yogic and warrior asana laced in. As one audience member pointed out spiritual and sensual. Since Shiva was of both sexes, the intimate end sequence of two of the women cradling one another, is intimacy beyond sex.

Connally and Co. performed 'Mind Has Many' a women's duet choreographed by Lauren Connelly. The spotlight comes up on Kelli McGovern and Molly Galbraith, in black wrestler togs, as they slink into a long pas de deux that is sometimes pugilistic, sometimes tender. intensity of their moves builds as they tangle on the ground or toss off clean demi-point pirouettes. Connelly's style is full of surprises, admirably, not derivative and in the back half the movement becomes so subtly engaging, who cares about the real or imagined s storyline.

Closing the first half was the explosive 'DeeTour' choreographed by six dancers, from an ensemble of 13 dancers in **Face da Phlave Entertainment & Theater**. It opens with hip-hoppers executing rote phrases until their teacher (Lauren Quattrone) lets them know they are just phoning it in and dismisses class. On the street, a homeless man asks her for money, when she gives it to him she is suddenly embraced by a new vision of the world as street dancers who swarm around her. The light dramatically changes and she is suddenly part of a fantasia of hip-hop virtuosity. Set to rock anthems by Andrew Ramsey & AmRa Ricketts, Face's innovative and razor precision ensemble sections build thrilling dance-theater. The audience erupted with sustained, lusty approval.

(At the audience confab after the concert moderated by dance historian Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Face co-director Marcus Tucker cited **Rennie Harris as their troupe's artistic mentor.**)

And after an intermission, it was vintage **Rennie Harris PureMovement** that followed performing Harris' "Bent" (Nothing but a Word) set to Al Jarreau's 70s jazz classic 'Spain (I Can recall)' featuring the dancers surfing Jarreau's scat vocalese, followed by a deep funk number by Mandrill. This work is non-narrative and at his most choreographically spirited and distilled. Cross-current ensemble streams turning up the dance fever to heart pounding dance crescendos. Harris sharp authenticity and esprit of street dance artistry, distinct from being commercially dumbed down. RHPM continues to bring the real thing. At one point the ensemble drops into a 'soul city walking' line-dance formation from the 70s club scene. Even going retro, Harris has a lot to eloquently say.

Festival coverage of the second half of program with Evalina Carbonell and more from Koresh Dance & capsules from the festival weekend shows continue in part 2 of this review.