

The New York Times

Dance Review

Hoofing It Into the Future

Rhythm in Motion Presents Its Annual Tap Showcase

By SIOBHAN BURKE - APRIL 11, 2014



A scene from Derick K. Grant's "Buzzcut Season." Credit Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Ask tap dancers what inspires them, and the conversation will probably turn to teachers, mentors, artistic ancestors. Perhaps more than any other, this is a dance form that knows where it came from, reveres its roots and doesn't relegate its history to the past.

But that doesn't stop it from hurtling forward. On Tuesday at the Theater at the 14th Street Y, the [American Tap Dance Foundation](#) brought back "[Rhythm in Motion](#)," its second annual showcase of artists who are taking tap in new directions. In his introduction, Tony Waag, the organization's industrious, optimistic director, praised the evening's participants for proving that tap "can take you somewhere," can tell a story, can transcend "nostalgia and fluff" (although, he added, "We love that, too").

All eight works, created at the American Tap Dance Center over the past year (a feel-good documentary chronicled the rehearsal process), lived up to that promise with varying degrees of finesse. This frequently dazzling program (the first of two) belongs to the present, a product of right now.

What clearer way to signal “contemporary” than with sound-manipulating machines and a voice-over about “the new generation”? Both are featured in “Thank you Forest,” in which the gargantuan Nicholas Young distorts and amplifies his bracing body percussion with three electronically rigged platforms. When five women in tight dresses join Mr. Young, the choreographer, the rhythmic results are astounding but the gender dynamic questionable.

The singular Michelle Dorrance took a more pared-down approach in “Deez and Deez,” a riveting, bluesy improvisation with Darwin Deez on electric guitar. In two emphatic interludes for her company, Apt. 33, Chloe Arnold took the driving beats of repetitive pop songs (Sean Paul’s “So Fine,” Eminem’s “Not Afraid”) and found boundless possibilities within them. Both she and Ms. Dorrance, along with Jason Samuels Smith, in his searing, playful “Acasmellyah,” remind us of how tap, at its most sophisticated, can seem to slow down or speed up time. It can also be a vehicle for cute, youthful dramas, as in Derick K. Grant’s finale, “Buzzcut Season.”

In Lisa La Touche’s “We Used to Hold,” the shaggy-haired, jangly limbed Sean Jackson lost himself in eccentric sonic experiments, overshadowing his three colleagues. In other group pieces, the so-called stars — Ms. Dorrance, Mr. Samuels Smith — meshed seamlessly with their less experienced dancers, who, on some level, are also their students. This in itself felt like an evolution: one generation bringing up the next.

Rhythm in Motion continues through Saturday at the Theater at the 14th Street Y, 344 East 14th Street, Manhattan; 646-230-9564, atdf.org.