

# MixUp is up close and personal

By Kris Eitland, San Diego Theatre Scene.com

The Vaudeville Theater is the size of a walk-in closet hidden behind a candy shop on El Cajon Blvd. in North Park. The MixUp Project featured nine choreographers in the cozy space last night. With a stage only 20 x 12 feet and 35 seats, this mini-space created a choreographic challenge and a uniquely intimate experience for both audience and performer.

Dance pioneer Betzi Roe and dancer Airelle Turner used every inch of the postage-stamp stage and with seamless movement told the story of a brother's death in "Onen." With sweeping arcs in unison and delicate cupped-hand gestures, the dancers transported the audience into their family's home to witness their loss. Dried flowers hung on the walls and overhead. After their bows, Roe simply cut down the flowers and smiled, which added to the personal, friendly environment.

Patricia Maldonado and Ivonne Vielman switched gears with the mod "Nosotras," to garage style Moog organ and guitar that was almost a drone. They did salsa steps and helicopter kicks and backward rolls, and took turns gazing into the lights, as if pondering the meaning of life.

William Lu's "Red Autumn" is balletic and romantic. Lu and Aya Yoneyama swiveled, twirled and shared each other's weight in lifts that laughed at the small space. As they slid across the black plywood floor, the swishing and thumping sounds were pleasing to the ear. The turns were organic and confident, crucial when the audience is just a few feet away.

Sadie Weinberg, a San Diego gem, performed with her signature athleticism and concentration in "The Mourner's Dance, Section II: Anger." Weinberg entered from the audience to sit on a gray chair. She slumped forward, threw her head backward again and again then moved across the stage with angular thrusts of legs and arms. She contorted and twisted, lead by her right hand. For just a moment, she stood motionless then began to fight her demons again with impressive technique and strength.

"Dancing Outside the Box," was predictably about a box. Choreographer Hilary Thomas and dancer Caterina Mercante assembled a cube from PVC pipe and a sheer stretch fabric and played peek-a-boo and over and through to a jazzy tune. As if the stage wasn't small enough, they cleverly condensed lifts and ballet turns to fit inside the 4-foot cube until one dancer escaped to the outside.

Works by other choreographers were not engaging. Freeman and Jun's rap movement had no snap. The music mix was schizophrenic. Cattaneo's creature trapped in a trashcan was mysterious with just her hands and head peeking over the rim, but once she climbed over, she morphed to a sex toy. Passman's "Secret Surprise" was an enigma from start to finish. Her swinging arms to the floor, crawls and Betty Boop faces didn't fit with or fight the gravel voiced music of Tom Waits.

Fighting was the supreme theme in "Soon Concept Spread," by Alison Marae Dunn. Dunn and fellow dancer Shelly McClain boxed, balanced on tiptoe and blasted each other with scathing stares and decorated each other with caution tape. Dancers were technically strong and focused. Complex phrases and gestures were repeated inventively, but text often seemed stilted and monotone. This was no spat; it was a war that could have been edited and condensed.

MixUp Project was a provocative well-produced event. As for the space, just remember the adage, "good things come in small packages."