



Aligning the bodily orbits

The Expanse Movement Arts Festival takes to the stage—and the streets—to make audience and performer alike comfortable with the ‘elitist’ art of dance

dancepreview

Expanse Movement Arts Festival

Runs 6–9 March
Catalyst Theatre (8529 Gateway Boulevard)

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Arts & Entertainment Staff

“The police didn’t get involved, which is always good,” assures Amber Borotsik, organizer for the annual Expanse Movement Arts Festival. An artist in her own right, Borotsik runs workshops in conjunction with the festival, one of which involves random acts of dance at top-secret locations. This last Saturday took them down Whyte Avenue with a skip, hop, and boogie-woogie in their step.

“We wanted to interact with the public in a totally open way, so there weren’t people who knew there was a performance that was going to be happening, which makes it harder for us and more nerve-racking,” Borotsik says. “But we wanted to go for it. We ran into some really awesome kids on the Ave who totally just went with us and went for it.”

Borotsik is quick to admit there wasn’t much chance of police

intervention, as the group wasn’t particularly threatening. But that’s the point of Expanse—creating a comfortable place for people, with or without experience, to enjoy movement in whatever form. The festival was originally called the Expanse New Works Dance Festival, but they changed the name to capture the variety of programming and to better characterize the festival’s mission.

“Our mandate is to connect audiences and artists from diverse disciplines,” Borotsik explains.

The result is this year’s collection of works, including everything from a tango on the trapeze performed by Annie Dugan of Firefly Theatre to Kathy Ochoa’s improvised, multimedia experience, *My Heart is a Pioneer*. Ochoa’s piece involves a video installation in the lobby of the theatre, which also incorporates live music and electronic beats. Over four days, and with the help of artists coming from as far away as Austria and Yellowknife, Borotsik hopes to bring an intimacy and communal feel to a genre of dance that’s often thought of as elitist.

“Contemporary dance sometimes has a reputation that it’s difficult, it’s not accessible, but I totally disagree with that. And we really work hard to create a really informal, fun atmosphere.”

The biggest contributing factor to that atmosphere is the venue—it’s

small. But the festival has moved from Azimuth Theatre to Catalyst Theatre this year because the stage at Azimuth can only be described as really, really small. Which, when it comes to dance, can get a little dangerous.

“The ceiling’s really low. We had a piece, maybe last year—it was two guys, and they were both 6’2”. If they really jumped, if they really leaped high, they could hit their head on the lights. So we thought, ‘Okay, maybe now we’re ready [to move].’”

As a result, the festival is moving out so that they don’t have to worry when they move on up. But keeping the festival intimate is still a priority.

“For me, I love watching movement up close because you can’t hide anything,” Borotsik says. “The audience sees everything. So they see that weird little tendon that’s kinda vibrating in your leg. You just get a chance to see dance from a totally different perspective. That, for me, was one of the of the coolest things about doing it at the Azimuth, which is a really nice thing about moving to the Catalyst Theatre space. Because Catalyst isn’t huge either—it’s just big enough.”

It took over a year and a half to plan the 2008 festival, but when it comes to audience response, Borotsik’s has a pretty simple barometer of success.

“I hope they come and have a really kickass time.”

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