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## Some dazzling surprises launch Dance Chicago

### REVIEW | Opening night full of thrills

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Dance Chicago, the annual festival of all things danceworthy from inside (and just beyond) this city, is the variety pack of dance programming. Every taste, texture and style of movement is on display during this monthlong event that, for the first time this year, is being staged at several different venues in the city and suburbs.

Curator John Schmitz's "one from column A-through-Z" formula is most in evidence on opening night. And this year's 15th anniversary kickoff -- held Saturday evening at Skokie's North Shore Center for the Performing Arts -- featured 15 different companies and independent artists. There were several fabulous surprises along the way, including these highlights:

- Full Effect DanceTheatre's "**Jook Joint**," choreographer Dane A. Campbell's jawdroppingly brilliant evocation of a rollicking roadside club that gradually morphs into a more contemporary hip-hop scene (and back again), with some of the most thrilling dancing, much of done at breakneck speed, you will ever see. I was totally unfamiliar with this company before this performance, but I won't soon forget its pure kinetic theatricality. This piece is a natural for Millennium Park's summertime Chicago Dancing Festival, whose producers should book it now and just wait for the audience's cheers.
- Mexican Dance Ensemble's elaborate "**Fandango Jarocho**" ("jaracho" is a style of music rooted in Veracruz), which was ideal for Halloween in its evocation of a celebration that suggested Day of the Dead activities. The large, foot-stomping ensemble, in folkloric costumes and ghostly makeup, was accompanied by live musicians, and together they created a vibrant spirit of place.
- Cerqua Rivera Dance Theatre in "**Home to Me**," a lyrical "heartbreak hotel" sort of work for three women and one man, set to music by Josh Kelley, with dancer Nicole Sebastian Betts particularly outstanding.

- Curie Metropolitan High School Dance Touring Company in Melinda Wilson's dark and driving "**Neurosis**" (a winner of the Dance Slam 2009 competition), in which nine dancers in black leotards and kneepads created a world that might be described as "locker room hell." Intense.
- Inaside Chicago Dance in choreographer Eddy Ocampo's "Beckon," a powerfully ritualistic piece. The excellent dancers wore starkly geometric red and black costumes, and moved to intriguing music by Manorama, Steve Reich, and Pulse Percussion Ensemble, with stark lighting by Josh Weckesser (who oversaw most of the evening's very effective lighting). Ocampo also choreographed "Orion" for the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble, a well-danced work set to Bach that owes a debt to Nederlands Dance Theatre's Jiri Kylian.
- Dori Santarsiere's "**Lanterna**" ("Universal Timekeepers"), a seductive, exotic piece (to music by Michael Nyman and the Global Drum Project) that was most elegantly danced by members of Thodos Dance Chicago (the troupe that presented its premiere) and Giordano Jazz Dance Chicago.

And there was more: A flashy Latin ballroom duet courtesy of Brandon and Serena; a zesty display of breakdancing by Phaze II: Crosstown Crew (that Asian guy with the glasses was amazing); a tap routine created by TRE' Dumas; the Hip Hop ConnXion Elite; a strange but compelling freak-house solo by Chris Nasadowski; Maeghan McHale's fleet "The Winner Is ...," evoking Olympic runners, danced by the Giordano II company; and a duet from Omaha Theater Ballet that showcased the notably fleet and accomplished dancing of Avram Gold.

The overall spirit in the dreary, corporate North Shore Center lobby left a great deal to be desired in terms of a sense of celebration. Happily, the work onstage compensated.

The many events in the Dance Chicago Festival will continue at several different venues through Dec. 12. For details go to [www.dancechicago.com](http://www.dancechicago.com).