

## A thrilling leap into action for fest

### DANCE REVIEW | 'Street Set' aptly sets table for Dance Chicago marathon

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BY [HEDY WEISS](#) Dance Critic

You've really got to hand it to John Schmitz, co-founder and artistic director of Dance Chicago, the ambitious festival that showcases a full spectrum of styles during its monthlong annual festival at the Athenaeum Theatre.

For this year's high-flying leap into action -- which was set in motion Friday night and will continue through Dec. 2 -- Schmitz charged choreographer Altin Naska with creating an opening piece that would serve as a kind of shorthand for everything to come. And Naska (aided and abetted by his dancers) ideally carried out that mission in "Street Set," a rollicking juxtaposition of ballet, jazz, contemporary, hip-hop and break dance set to an original score by Ben Johnson. The movement spoke loudly and clearly and made all the necessary points about stylistic cross-currents (and differences) with panache.

Then it was on to a packed program featuring nine additional works of every shape and size.

In "Chronicles of a Marriage," choreographer Dmitri Peskov has created a knockout duet with powerhouse, soul-bearing Ingmar Bergman-like overtones. Intensely intimate and very adult in its eroticism, it has been ideally set to the anguished music of Henryk Gorecki and was boldly danced by Peskov and Christina Eltvedt.

Both heavenly gospel and honky-tonk blues infused "Heaven -- Joy and Humanity, Clarity and Resolve," the swirling Alvin Ailey-like work by Kevin Iega Jeff and Gary Abbott that was performed with feverish high energy by six dancers from Deeply Rooted Dance Theater 2. In Eddy Ocampo's world premiere "Thwack," five dancers from Black Box Dance gleefully took on Steve Reich's clapping rhythms.

River North Chicago Dance Company gave a breathtaking rendering of Lauri Stallings' "ahimsa," the hypnotic 2005 piece by this former Hubbard Street dancer-turned-choreographer. Stallings' work, set to music by Reich and Mark Isham, is a mysterious, surprising, highly theatrical dance -- one full of imagination and sophisticated quirkiness. Christopher Ash's lighting works additional wonders.

Julia Rhoads, director of Lucky Plush Productions, also is a wonderfully quirky choreographer. In "Walkie Talkies" (an excerpt from "Cinderbox 18," making its full debut Nov. 15-17 at the Museum of Contemporary Art), she displayed her gift for tapping the humor in contemporary dance, with her performers as skilled in their acting as their dancing. A real hoot.

Also on the program: the World Championship Trinity Irish Dancers, with their dazzling precision footwork, weightless jumps and the stiletto-like moves of a lead couple in Mark Howard's "Step About & Just Shannon"; a starkly acrobatic push-pull duet, "Trip-up," sharply danced by Tan Temel and Sernaz Demirel; an exquisite rendering by Thodos Dance Chicago of Lucas Crandall's "Lullaby," set to Bach's Goldberg Variations, and Tony Powell's thrilling "Impulse," a ferocious ensemble work that always brings cheers for Giordano Jazz Dance Chicago.

For complete details about the many upcoming programs of Dance Chicago, go to [www.dancechicago.com](http://www.dancechicago.com)

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