

Local and out-of-town dancers to expand horizons

By Michael Upchurch
Seattle Times arts critic

Choreographers from Amsterdam, Mexico, Ecuador (via Seattle-Tacoma) and Poland (via Oregon). Plus, Seattle's own Phffft! Dance Theater Company.

That's what's offered in this three-day festival "inspired by artist-to-artist inquiry."

Phffft!'s artistic director, Cyrus Khambatta, is the mover and shaker whose travels and outreach helped bring this smorgasbord together. Khambatta moved from New York to Seattle with his wife in 2001, and Phffft! has been active here since 2003.

The troupes joining Phffft! in the festival are Las Pléyades Danza Contemporánea (Mexico), Agnieszka Laska Dancers (Portland) and Carla Barragan's BQdanza, a Seattle-Tacoma-based multimedia dance group.

Suzy Blok and Company from Amsterdam will screen a video, "Tus Ojos Negros," the first glimpse of a projected two-year collaboration between Phffft! and Blok. (Seattle International Film Festival goers may recall Blok from her work in "Yes Nurse! No Nurse!" — a sublimely silly Dutch musical in which Blok, among other touches, has leapfrogging businessmen treating their briefcases like airborne dance partners.)

One motive behind the festival was Khambatta's feeling that the Seattle dance scene has "a bit of an insular feeling."

"I like it," he adds. "You have this little incubator to hatch work."

But with his own dance past rooted in the East Coast and Europe, he wanted to "reconnect." And he finds it stimulating, for both dancers and audiences, when familiar local troupes are juxtaposed with out-of-towners onstage.

Khambatta's latest work, "Love Story," takes Phffft! in a more dancerly direction from its usual spoken word/gymnastic tumbling mélange. (For a short, sharp blast of the latter, check out the video of "Modern Barbarism" on www.phffft.org.)

"Love Story," which I saw in rehearsal last week, is anchored by a pair of limber duets between Khambatta and two dancers. A gender-fluid meditation on the nature of love, "Love Story" does have some verbal content, but it's present mostly in video sequences featuring interviews with folks around town, including Spectrum Dance Theater's Donald Byrd.

The three-day festival features two programs:

Program One, 8 p.m. today and Saturday: Phffft! Dance Theatre Company, Las Pléyades Danza Contemporánea and (on video) Suzy Blok and Dancers.

Program Two, 8 p.m. Sunday: Agnieszka Laska Dancers and BQdanza.

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Phffft! Company dancers (from left) Liz Erber, Rachel Barker, Chris McCallister and Lauren Ehnebuske in "Love Story."

Dance preview

"Beyond the Threshold: Seattle International Dance Festival," 8 p.m. today through Sunday, Broadway Performance Hall, 1625 Broadway, Seattle; \$12-\$20 single tickets; \$20-\$25 festival pass (800-838-3006 or www.BrownPaperTickets.com; information, www.phffft.org).