

Casually unpolished, experimental performance show offers the unique

By D. K. Row

Don't go to Conduit tonight expecting lithe bodies bounding in the air, offering poetic testimony to the human body.

The downtown dance center's latest event, "30 Days Notice," is instead a casual multimedia festival where movement comes from the mind, not the body. Think dissonant soundscapes, spoken word monologues, ambient video images and, at times, any combination of the three.

The finished results, at least Thursday evening, were a mixed bag: Film in the "30 Days" vernacular isn't "Top Gun" but rather a minutes-long, low-tech homoerotic riff on the popcorn blockbuster starring Tom Cruise.

Indeed, "experimental" is the appropriate word for "30 Days," which was conceived by Conduit co-directors Mary Oslund and Teresa Mathern as an attempt to expand their core audience beyond dance. To that end, the duo enlisted three artists immersed in the local video, film, theater, performance and music scenes -- Erin Boberg, David Bryant and Joe Janiga -- to curate the series.

The curators presented one caveat for the performers: They had 30 days to make their work, which also could not exceed 10 minutes.

Clearly, some of the nine performers and collaborators were more prepared than others. But overall, the evening's spirited camaraderie reminded those of us old enough

to remember what it was like to wander downtown New York in the '80s and, on a whim, catch an evening of experimental performance somewhere for a mere several bucks.

In other words, the special sense of discovery was in seeing something that wasn't going on anywhere else in the city -- something like Brendan Anderegg's beautiful environmental and computer soundscapes, which gathered a strange lyric momentum after several minutes. Or Amos Latteier's funny Spalding Gray meets Steven Wright meets French Dadaist Francis Picabia faux monologue on the anthropological roots of the human face.

There were several video contributions, which ranged from Ed Mellnik's arty 1980 abstract video, "Sleeper," to Catherine Egan and Crispin Rosencrantz's series of "Saturday Night Live"-style short takes, which included the "Top Gun" riff and other sometimes inane navel-gazing antics. Similarly, Michael Lastra's videos touched the higher fringes of thoughtful quirkiness before giving way to a more fraternal sensibility.

Of course, the evening wouldn't be worthwhile if there wasn't something that befuddled and amused, something that blurred the line between profundity and stupidity. This is performance art, after all.

The talented visual artist damali ayo collaborated with James Moore and Kollodi on a performance sketch that incorporated

text by writers Jamaica Kincaid, Harold Pinter and Richard Brautigan and the performers' own ideas. This critic wasn't sure of the source of the squabbles witnessed on stage, which incorporated music from a boombox and much physical agitation from all three. But the unsettling frisson, of embarrassment and admiration for the performers, suggested that the audience was being made privy to something unusually personal.

This is the first of three "30 Days Notice" events, Mathern said, with a second series expected in the fall. Let's hope the performers remain casually unpolished. To be otherwise would undermine the uniqueness of "30 Days Notice."