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Choreographic Crisscross

Three local dancers meet at
Intersections.

By Catherine Thomas

Heidi Carlsen, Jae Diego and Tahni Holt intersect at Conduit. The three compelling new dance works that make up *Intersections* diverge in some important respects: their unusual themes and contrasts of moods and intensity. But the pieces, by Jae Diego, Heidi Carlsen and Tahni Holt, do intersect—in tight, thoughtful choreography and careful attention to impressions of light and music. Despite abstraction or highly personal subject matter, each avoids being overtly self-referential or obscure.

Jae Diego's *Winnowing* is danced by Tracy Broyles, Jenn Gierada and Rhonda Summer in solos, duos and trios drawn from classical lines. The mood is spare and quiet, focusing on simple but evocative gestures; Diego's choreographic skill shows in the dancers' fluidity and her eye for silhouetting shapes in space.

The piece opens with the dancers in the still pose of Jean-François

Millet's painting *The Gleaners*, a depiction of three women harvesting sheaves of grain, and from there erupts outward in wide and lyrical gestures. The bodies wave like wheat in the wind, their expressionless faces allowing attention to be drawn to the beauty of the physical images. The sanguine mood is offset by Summer's solo dance with a chair, a continuation of the simple movement with some unexpected twitches; her technical training serves her well here.

Broyles' and Gierada's sharp, waltz-like movement accomplishes fast and fluid changes from tumbling to arcing. Broyles has a balanced, grounded presence; even vigorous floor- and footwork seem organically motivated. Gierada's long lines create visually interesting angles reminiscent of Diego's own. The sweetly lyrical folk tunes on piano, fiddle and flute are as rich in their simplicity as the movement in this classic piece.

Heidi Carlsen's dance play, *The Line Between*, signals a marked contrast in mood. Disquieting and intensely riveting, it explores the personal and social ramifications of mental illness from the perspective of a woman under diagnosis. As a choreographer, Carlsen presents a compelling social reflection while portraying a tormented psyche through movement; as a director, she creates an unsettling mood by alternating movement and music with industrial sound and silence. As a dancer she possesses a rich vocabulary, rendering a powerful physical portrayal of an individual's struggle for sanity: She creates chillingly alien movements, loses

control of everyday motions and becomes literally off-balance, using the stage and her body to expound the metaphor of her precarious navigation.

The Line Between opens with Carlsen seated alone in a chair on a high platform, her first stiff movements making her appear to levitate. A clinical voice comes from offstage: "Next. Checkup." Her unusual movements become increasingly floppy and erratic, and she uses odd combinations to draw attention to her perspective, sometimes focusing on a small aspect of her body such as her pointed fingers, other times jumping compulsively to relentless industrial noise.

What follows in her interplay with the lab-coated Melissa Kerr is designed to make the audience uncomfortable, and the discomfort builds. Kerr never dances; she is mechanical order to Carlsen's organic chaos. Where Carlsen is emotional, unpredictable and immediate, Kerr is measured and distant, resembling a system rather than a person by the piece's end. Carlsen gives the impression of hiding from the scrutiny of an external eye throughout. She doesn't need to engage the audience to make her point—that we are absorbed by her irregularity and fascinated by her responses to invisible stimuli because we identify with her fear. Kerr ignores her, but we can't.

Carlsen delivers a monologue in this piece, a mixture of compulsive chatter, skewed rationality and hysteria. It's gripping, well-placed and convincingly spontaneous. By

play's end, she has left the audience pondering the meaning of normalcy and created an indelible, discomfoting image.

Tahni Holt's postmodernist trio, *There's Only One Fire Lane on the Runway*, is a touching exploration of the crisis of departing from loved ones at an airport. She approaches her subject with a cinematic eye, creating the illusion of a vintage black-and-white film through visual vignettes and lighting effects. Holt, Kerr and Melissa Ngirailemesang

play off each other in scenes of duos and trios punctuated by blackouts and single frozen images. Provocative poses are contrasted with everyday gestures, helping to maintain the audience's interest in the abstract motions. In one scene, the dancers slide down a wall while delivering a slow and beautifully harmonized rendition of *You Are My Sunshine*.

Holt has developed intriguing movement phrases for impact, and she hasn't rushed the expression.

The dancers are strong and energetic, using their entire bodies, harnessing slow-motion synchronicity and contrasting elongated lines with offbeat surprises. The departure scenes seem lengthened in time, effectively capturing the feelings of moments you don't want to end but are nonetheless compelled to. By incorporating convincing emotional nuance in the dancers' faces, Holt has successfully avoided sentimentality and created a visually intriguing work.