

# WILLAMETTE WEEK

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## Key Turn Project

Free eats and cheap drinks can't save a free-falling new dance company.

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Before the lights went down at the debut performance of Key Turn Project —Portland's newest contemporary dance and music collective—the company had a lot going for it: a group of fresh-faced founders, complimentary snacks and cheap drinks for its patrons, and a noticeably young, surprisingly large (and vocal) crowd at its first outing.

Key Turn has a stated mission of making modern dance more (buzzword alert) "accessible," and so cocktail tables, coffee cake and candlelight were the order of the evening. Breaking with tradition, not to mention tidiness, food and drink were allowed in the dance studio for consumption during the show. And although publicized to begin at 5:30 pm, the program didn't start until nearly 6:15. People chatted and socialized amiably. There were two intermissions, each lasting nearly as long as the dance segment before it. You may wonder, as I did throughout: Was there any real dance to go with all this ambience?

Well, yes and no.

Good news first. There was one major breakout: tiny, tattooed Jen Hackworth. Of four Key Turn founders, Hackworth exhibited the best dance chops—clean, expressive, energized—and showed the most choreographic promise with "And Then There Was That," an angry sextet-plus-one. She's dynamite, and you can't keep your eyes off her.

The rest of the dancers, and dances, were less inspired. KTP co-founder Kerry Greenwood's "The Explanation" (*sic*) was a jagged-elbowed, stop-and-start theme and variations light, accompanied by a chilly, organ-spiked soundscape (music by James Wickens). Another co-founder, Amanda Byars, contributed a cutesy mother-daughter scenario, "Learning to Fall," with thrusting jumps, lots of rocking and fetal positioning, all to a John Teshian keyboard solo (Wickens again) that incorporated fragments of the children's nursery song "London Bridge." Aiyana Maye's (a third co-founder) "Changing-You-Me," performed to a dreamy jazz-combo arrangement (Wyatt Wooding and Chuck Crary), was endearingly off-kilter, even if it went nowhere.

One other thing worried me about Key Turn: the striking resemblance one dance bore to the next, as if each choreographer was not only speaking the same language but with the same accent. One searched in vain for innovations or risk-taking in form, in content, in structure. And emotions were checked at the door.

*Key Turn Project has not yet announced a follow-up show. For more events at Conduit Dance Studio, call 221-5857 or visit [conduit-pdx.org](http://conduit-pdx.org).*