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### 'RV' roams, speaks eloquently of trailer parks and urban life

By Catherine Thomas

Erik Kaiel's choreographic study of RV culture and the Dutch architecture movement de Stijl, which played at the Conduit studio space Friday and Saturday nights, is a work that roams lofty conceptual byways, veering from futuristic abstraction to break dance, with detours into American trailer parks and the urban jungle.

Danced by Kaiel with his Dutch collaborator, Erik van Duijvenbode, "RV" (rietveld variations) is not an easily accessible piece. But it is bursting with ideas, from van Duijvenbode's bizarre solo with an extension cord to the redneck sing-along that gets this unconventional road trip barreling towards a unifying theme.

On the surface, the dozen or so non sequitur scenes in "RV" seem to be about the boxed-in tension of conformity and the lure of the open road. The extension cord strangling van Duijvenbode is plugged into a socket held in his mouth; he uses it as a respirator, hosing air into a body virtually straitjacketed by coiled electricity. Shakes flow up his leg, twitches rack his spine. It's a dubious improvement on the environment he just escaped, housed in a piece of luggage.

That's the complicated point of departure for abstract scenes of strident marching, tenuous balances and flick-knife lifts and catches, and it quickly becomes apparent that there will be no bold assertions on the utopian functionality of de Stijl or the rootless romance of the motor home.

Instead, Kaiel offers a generous look at the body as geometry, linear planes cutting against each other at sharp angles, origami folds and an illusion of two-dimensionality that's nailed by van Duijvenbode popping and locking his limbs into crisp, razorlike vectors.

The anti-expansiveness of these scenes, where clinical precision dominates, is given much-needed release in the dance's most human moment, when the pair breaks stride to open a couple of folding chairs, doff trucker hats, and crack 40-ouncers of American-brewed beer.

It's a moment ripe for a condescending riff on trailer-park culture, but Kaiel and van Duijvenbode laudably play it straight, bursting into a medley of song that includes a Dutch rendition of "Rawhide." Hat clutched to chest, van Duijvenbode sings in plaintive voice, as believably sentimental as Kaiel's gorgeously vocalized "Mobile Home on the Range."

Every dance that follows rides in the wake of that nostalgia, turning even abstraction humane. "RV" remains in need of some road improvement -- better lighting, shorter solos, a score that ditches the New Age and lyric-driven recorded music of the opening scenes -- but it's a dance that eloquently speaks to urban life on a harried treadmill and the uncharted horizon of the highway.