

## The Oregonian

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### Mathern's new dances blend craft with concept

By Cerinda Survant  
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Teresa Mathern's new dances resemble Victorian glass paperweights. The surface shines slick and glossy while vivid color and complex pattern gleam underneath. They're a pleasure to watch.

Mathern's *ReMember* and *Versus* received their Portland premiere last weekend at Conduit; her concert continues Friday through Sunday. An earlier version of *ReMember* premiered in Manhattan in 1995 while Mathern studied at New York University and the Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies; the solo section of *Versus* premiered last June in Seattle. These performances are the first time Mathern -- long a respected Portland dancer, choreographer and teacher -- has shown work since her return last year.

Like most Portland choreographers, she is an attentive craftsman; like only a few, she operates at a sophisticated conceptual level. These dances' most satisfying moments -- and there are

many -- come when the sheer sensuality of movement infuses more cerebral, structural pleasures. Mathern's work is quite capable of evoking a kinesthetic response and ultimately a visceral response as well.

In *Versus*, a calm, sustained opening trio makes quite clear the dance's root concern -- the spiral helix. The dancers' wrists trace spiral paths through space; their torsos slowly spin and sink; a balance turns and lowers to the floor. As their pace quickens, the movement enlarges, he traces expand and the dancers describe bigger swaths across the floor. *Versus* toys with the viewer's expectations: tweaking one member of the trio out of unison; using canon and abandoning it; subjecting clearly delineated movement to enough alteration and variation to keep our interest.

The trio is only rarely a trio: More often it is a duet plus solo, three discrete solos, or one solo performed in three different ways, times and places. At its most effusive *Versus* is even two simultaneous duets, as Mathern joins dancers Jae Diego, Bridgette Forrest and Jenn Gierada. Mathern's solo -- dance's coolest, clearest exposition of structure -- gradually slows, circles in

on itself and draws to a close. In terms of movement alone, *ReMember* is a more complex dance. *ReMember* utilizes bony, angular movement, movement that doesn't have the same automatic kinesthetic "hit" as the arcs and spirals of *Versus*. Diego, Dawn Joella Jackson and Mathern begin the dance with an intense focus on the movement they're performing; each watches her wrist or elbow as if measuring, analyzing, recording in a lab. Bit by bit, the texture of the movement changes: An extended limb slashing space makes the air tangible; joints spring with syncopated rhythms. Sections of discrete, careful phrases alternate with generous dance-y ones.

But because Mathern stages *ReMember* more fully, it is more approachable and embracing. Painted set pieces echo the dance's structures; elaborate lighting suggests changing times and places. Rita Marquez sings and speaks over a collage of recorded music. The multi-layered narrative tells tales of sense memory and body knowledge, of dream and memory, and creates a dramatic rationale for the movement and its peaks, valleys, climax and denouement.