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Dance review

'Convergence' diverges over sightlines

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Katrina O'Brien's "Convergence," which premiered at Conduit Dance Studio on Saturday evening, is a dance choreographed for the front row. Its central conceit is the notion of corridors, the stage configured as two long passageways to explore abstract ideas of travel, points of departure and arrival, and detours in between.

The good news: O'Brien's reconfiguring of the Conduit space (seats face the long side walls of the deep ballroom) maximizes audience viewing, at least for those flanking the stage.

The bad news: With no risers to improve sight lines and whole sections of the dance devoted to floor work, half of the performance is obscured for audience members seated behind that prime first-row real estate. By dance's end, many were standing against the back wall, still craning their necks, and perhaps only those who stood on their chairs got a good shot of the action.

This isn't a new problem to plague dance company debuts, but it's a perplexing one: Choreographers have presumably spent enough time watching dance to realize that, for spectators of this visual movement art, field of view is key.

"Convergence" taxes its audience in other ways: Filing in, we are asked either to remove our shoes or to don booties, causing a logjam at the door. And during

an interminable intermission, ushers reconfigure the seating. For those hoping for improved viewing, it's a tease. The seats are turned around, but the view is nearly identical -- we're staring at a blank wall, minus the windows. It's here that I wish O'Brien's news release's mention of "mirrored corridors" had been literal. A mirror behind the stage might have reflected all that movement on the floor for the back rows.

O'Brien's choreography combines pedestrian movement (cartwheels, fighter-stance weaves, jogging) with the inverted lifts and catches of modern dance. Her six-member company -- besides O'Brien, it numbers Patricia Germann, Jenny Chane Gilbert, Jessica Hightower, Esther LaPointe and Shannon Parsons -- is capable, but underrehearsed. Lifts, especially, look precariously unsteady. Chartreuse-and-plum costumes, prone to static cling, flatter no one. The score is a mix of hip-hop, tango electronica and cabaret both torchy and circusy.

Where the choreography shines is in unexpected details: a recurring motif of an arm folded across a stomach; catches that slide down legs; a long spin injected with a carefully choreographed wobble; a dancer slowly inching her way along the back wall while her fellow dancers jump, catch and cartwheel in front of her.

And while it's difficult to pinpoint the differences between "Part 1: Territory Markings" and "Part 2: Getting There"

other than speed and momentum
(amplified in Part 2) both are dense with
movement that utilizes every corner of the
stage, including its edge. The dancers are
up close and personal in a section that
finds them jumping maniacally, hands
twined between their legs, inches away
from their audience.

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