

# The Oregonian

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**Dance review**

## **'Dance/3' bargain no clearance-sale deal**

**At Conduit - Veteran and young dancers show how good Portland's movement arts can be**

**By Bob Hicks**  
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It's tacky, but entirely human, to judge a performance by the price of the ticket.

So I walked out after "Dance/3," last weekend's three-choreographer program at Conduit, feeling a little smug. I'd paid \$15, and got much better in return.

It's not that "Dance/3" knocked me for an aesthetic loop, although Gregg Bielemeier's "Askew" came mighty close. But it offered many pleasures, perhaps chief of which was a reaffirmation that for all its ups and downs, contemporary dance in Portland can be very good.

It's easy to get discouraged about the scene here. Dancers work part time, rarely able to develop the polish, technique and togetherness that are the great benefits of working with a full-time professional company. Experience and talent often vary wildly. Choreographers often don't know how to edit themselves, falling back on the same old moves and letting their pieces wander. Sometimes things are so ragged it's hard to know what the choreography would look like if it were better performed.

How great, then, to see three dances performed with intense heart and assured skill. Among the evening's pleasures:

Seeing veteran dance maker Bielemeier at the top of his form, melding wit, grace and surprise in his two-dancer, three-movement piece, "Askew."

Rediscovering what a terrific dancer the fine choreographer Tere Mathern can be in another choreographer's piece, and enjoying her Mutt-and-Jeff partnership with the tall, strong and talented Robyn Conroy in "Askew."

Watching dancer Sarah Ebert break out with a deeply focused, finely felt solo in Gabriel Masson's dance, "Inevitable."

Watching Conroy make the difficult leap from dancer to choreographer with her long, sometimes sexy, sometimes frantic dance, "Seeing the Real."

Seeing three choreographers working with genuinely danceable scores, not meandering ambient soundtracks: Bielemeier with Astor Piazzola and Charles Ives' "Unanswered Questions" (plus a fascinating opening movement with no music except an occasional bird whistle); Masson with Philip Glass; Conroy with a varied pop track running from Calexico to Bjork to Son of the Electric Ghost.

Of the three dances, Bielemeier's "Askew" is both performed and conceived at a high level, an altogether satisfying partnership of technique, intellect and emotion. Masson's "Inevitable" flirts now and again with off-the-rack Romanticism but is a solid, engaging dance with an effective surprise ending.

Conroy's "Seeing the Real" has a lot of the earmarks of a beginning choreographer's work. It's long, not always focused and a little like the kitchen sink: loaded with a jumble of ideas. A lot of it seems to be inspired by the club scene, and sometimes it's a little hard to tell whether she's abstracting from club dancing or just restaging it.

But the dance also reveals a good deal of passion and a welcome professional approach. A healthy dance scene needs to be continually reinvigorated with new people and new ideas, and Conroy shows promise of developing as a dance maker. Keep an eye out to see what she does next.

