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Watch 'Em Go

Revving Up May Make You Feel Like Dancing

By Tanya Ignacio

For many people, the term “modern dance” gives rise to visions of grimly serious young women in black leotards enacting some angst-ridden drama. But stereotypes are made to be disproven, and that’s the case with dancer and choreographer Gregg Bielemeier’s latest, totally hi-fi creation, *Revving Up*.

This collaboration between the silly and the witty Bielemeier and his silliest and wittiest cohorts is, the dancer puts it, an “eclectic, living-roomesque, natural light, acoustic music, stereo console kind-of-show.” Like a good party where the people are interesting, the hors d’oeuvres are tasty and the music is divine, *Revving Up* contains elements that are alone worth the price of admission.

It also proves that serious artists know how to have a good time. *Revving Up* combines the talents of the Gregg Bielemeier Dance Project (Bielmeiere, Eric Skinner, Michael Barber, Joan Findlay, Kristin Young and Jae Diego) and a host of musical and visual artists. Musical co-conspirators include vocalist Lyndee Mah, trumpeter Steve Cannon, the Portland Saxophone Quartet (Gary Harris, Jeff Homas, Tom Cheek and Mark Davey), and the trio 3 Leg Torso (Courtney von Drehle, Gabe Leavitt

and Bela Balogh). Visual pranksters include lighting designer Bill Boese and stylist Paul Horner. Painter-sculptors Christine Bourdette, Kristy Edmunds, Amy Estrin, Joan Findlay, Mark Larsen, Gregory Roberts and Phil Sylvester each decorated a different window in the spacious Conduit studio.

Composed of seven dances and one musical moment, *Revving Up* is light, airy and entertaining. Two pieces in particular stand out: “ManTango Opera Lounge” and “still caucasian after all these years?” “ManTango” is probably the programs heaviest item, a sensual duet between Bielemeier and guest dancer MinhTran, backed by Mah’s powerhouse voice. Clothed in sheer brocade outfits designed by Laurel Leverton, both men display fluid movements. Bielemeier is tall and muscular while Tran is small and lithe, and their disparate builds accentuate their grace as they perform a synopsis of a relationship – the chase, the passion, the familiarity that leads to disinterest. Bielemeier uses repetition to show this progression: a leap-frog sequence that seemed sensual when performed languidly early in the piece later on seems desperate when performed quickly.

The piece “still caucasian after all these years?” is a hysterical solo by Bielemeier. Giving away too much detail will spoil the surprise of this delightful number, but it shows Bielemeier at his comical best and is the entertaining evening’s perfect finale.

The remainder of *Revvig Up* is somewhat unsubstantial but pleasing. In the ensemble works, Bielemeier uses a movement theme of grace contrasted with heaviness; as a result, these pieces are difficult to distinguish from one another. But this similarity provides a sense of continuity as it reinforces Bielemeier’s style.

All the evening’s elements pull their own weight. The costumes, mostly designed by Bielemeier, are retro-slinky 1960s and ‘70s styles ranging from paisley caftans to velour-like bell-bottoms, the retro feel is accentuated by the women’s hair, which is arranged in bouffants, French twists and flips.

I’d call any evening that combines both saxophones and accordions heavenly. But the sheer diversity of the music in *Revvig Up* is impressive. From the get-down-and-get funky Portland Saxophone Quartet to the demented strains of 3 Leg Torso to the versatile sounds of Stan Wood’s vibraband to the punch of Mah’s incredible vocals, no musical stone is left unturned.

The only disappointing facet of the evening was the visual art’s lack of relationship to the performance as a whole. While the window dressings are fantastic, in only one instance do the performers interact with the art. This lack of integration reduced the visual art to mere background.

This small criticism aside, *Revvig Up* is delectable. Made from only the freshest ingredients, the performances are light, entertaining and smart. You won’t go home pondering the deeper meanings of life. Instead, you’ll be invigorated, ready to turn on the stereo and do some dancing yourself.