

## Affirming Life and the Unexpected

August 29, 2003

By JENNIFER DUNNING

The rallying cry of Dancers Responding to AIDS (DRA) is that there will be dancing for joy once a cure for AIDS is found, but until then, "we dance for life."

"Dancing for Life!," a performance series benefiting DRA, the dance-related wing of Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, opened the two-week NYC Festival of Dance on Wednesday in Bryant Park. The wide-ranging performances included troupes like the Martha Graham Dance Company, Pilobolus and Dance Theater of Harlem, as well as groups performing choreography by the Paul Taylor dancers Takehiro Ueyama, Orion Duckstein and Heather Berest.

The late-afternoon program, the second of four, was a model of affirmation, both of life and of dance in nearly all its guises. The heart of the program was the appearance of the Rhythm Dance Center of Marietta, Ga., the winner of this year's DRA fund-raising competition for dance studios throughout the nation. The dancers of the center, which raised \$19,323, were sleekly professional and full of vibrant life in two stylish pieces: "Another Cha Cha," choreographed by Becca Moore and Dani Rosenberg to music by Santa Esmerelda, and Tonya Hughes's "Coming Up."

The beautifully trained young dancers stood out particularly for their clear articulation of the flowing gestures in "Coming Up," set to music by Ani DiFranco. The three choreographers also knew how to move their performers deftly around the stage.

Whether by design or coincidence, three pas de deux midway through the program suggested the richness and expressive potential of the duet. Rebecca Stenn's "Embrace," performed by Ms. Stenn and Trebien Pollard to music by Messiaen, was a matter of slow moves, holds and near-stillness, with the two bodies becoming calligraphic symbols for love rather than lovers.

Matthew Neenan's "Until Ten," danced by Mr. Neenan and

Amanda Miller, a member of his Philadelphia-based Phrenic New Ballet, seemed to take its cues from the music it was set to, one of the few unfamiliar Chopin dance pieces. Quietly surprising choreography contrasted the feeling of delicate ballet ornamentation for the limbs with the gutsy implacability of the two torsos.

An excerpt from Randy James's "Estuary," danced by Matthew Henley and Sarah Wagner, sometimes to music by Tartini, sometimes in silence, lived up to the dance's title. It had long, flowing phrases in configurations that, like the choreography of the other two pieces, were decidedly unexpected.

Arthur Aviles's "Empieza el Revulu," performed to driving rhythms of scores by the C and C Music Factory and Mandaley, was a dance for four jiving, funky young urbanites.

But Mr. Aviles worked against that familiar genre by playing with patterns and pacing. Late in the piece, he introduced two dancers, dressed in dark clothes, who functioned as free-spirited anchors to the others' ebb and flow.

The four-program mini-festival, put together by DRA, was more ambitious than most and certainly more civilized in its laidback, gracious atmosphere, underscored by the genial commentary of Andrew Asnes, the master of ceremonies on Wednesday afternoon. But the stage space, with its expanse of white at the back, was not kind to the slithering, highly detailed dancing in an excerpt from Wil Swanson's "Naked Singularities."

Two pieces performed by the Altered Modalities troupe, both choreographed by Martha Kelly-Fiero, were not helped by her choice of music.

The scores, one by Bjork, one by Craig Armstrong, did not move or interestingly handicap Ms. Kelly-Fiero's stretching movement style, and she did not seem to have decided whether to come down on the side of abstract jazz dance or moody narrative.

Proceeds from the classes, workshops and discussions that make up the balance of the festival, which runs through

Sept. 14, will go to DRA.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/08/29/arts/dance/29AIDS.html?ex=1063171222&ei=1&en=7b8deee80ae52f02>

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