

Dance

Pas de Deux With Reality: Performers Take to the Sidewalks At Improvisational Festival, Challenging Encounters

By SARAH HALZACK
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"The thrill of not knowing what comes next, the unpredictability of passersby and the novelty of dancing with concrete underfoot and dirt under your fingernails — these are the things that make street improvisation events so rewarding for performers. However, engaging the transitory and often involuntary audience members that they attract can be a bit more challenging. On Saturday at the D.C. 13th International Improvisation Festival, in the bustling downtown blocks near the Gallery Place Metro stop, the performers achieved mixed levels of success.

Tony Olivares's "Traveler" was presented on a sidewalk outside Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library. Olivares and a female performer stood in plain white underwear beside a massive heap of white tulle fabric. After painting their exposed flesh white, they manipulated the tulle, slowly dragging it down the block and later wrapping them-

selves in it. This event lacked focus. In trying to relate to each other, interact with the audience and utilize the fabric, this duo never really found their stride. Nonetheless, they should be credited for good judgment with the pedestrians. When doing something invasive like tugging at someone's scarf or dabbing paint on a forehead, they were careful to pick people who seemed curious and receptive.

Hours later on the same stretch of sidewalk, Dance Antonini performed "Particles," in which each of the five performers had helium-filled balloons on long ribbons attached to her shoulders. The whimsy and instant visual intrigue of this concept were ideal for a street performance. Because of the breeze, the ribbons would unexpectedly intertwine, linking two dancers together. Instead of incorporating those fortuitous moments into the performance, they broke character and freed themselves. This was a disappointing fix at a festival that celebrates the art of thinking on one's feet.

In "A Rose in the Wild," soloist



BY R. FINKELSTEIN

Jane Franklin and her dancers performed "One Step Behind" outside the American Art Museum.

Naoko Maeshiba dealt masterfully with some challenging interlopers. An energetic toddler, a hungry pigeon and a man on a scooter all whizzed through her performance space but never disrupted her spell.

Also performing outside the library, Maeshiba capitalized on the proximity of her audience with minute wiggles of a single finger or toe. These movements would have been almost undetectable in a traditional theater setting.

While Maeshiba excelled at adapting to her environment, Jane

Franklin Dance succeeded in making it melt away. They performed "One Step Behind" after sundown on the steps and sidewalk outside of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. The authenticity of their emotions and the simple, haunting music transported the audience away from the bright, flashing lights of Ve-

rizon Center to somewhere much more tranquil.

In addition to the live performances, Cassie Meador of Dance Exchange created an online-only performance called "Offsite and Insight." The video feels artistically incomplete, but still features some pleasingly creative concepts.

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