

The Arts

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Review: Beyond the Threshold festival off to a stunning start, indoors and out

Compagnie Prototype Status, with two solo dances, is the knockout at Seattle's Beyond the Threshold.

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If an entire dance review could be composed of repetitions of the sentence, "Do *not* miss Compagnie Prototype Status," I'd leave it at that. But readers, I suspect, want more.

CPS — one of the headliners in the Seattle International Dance Festival, Beyond the Threshold — hails from Switzerland. But its aesthetic is so spare it's almost Zenlike. And its dancers are so exquisitely fine in their muscle control, they're like creatures from another world.

Both their pieces are solos: "Caso & Caos," performed by Elina Müller Meyer, and "Frozen," performed by Jasmine Morand, who's the troupe's choreographer.

"Caso" begins with a figure pushing a broom to create a perfect circle of sand on a dimly lit stage. This will be her "platform." After putting the broom aside, she lies prone at the circle's center, exploring its reaches in movements that are barely perceptible at first. Even when she's in more obvious movement, her control defies belief. At one point, crouched down, she creates the illusion that she's being rotated by some outside force — there's not a sign of effort on her part.

As Enrique Gonzalez Müller's ambient/industrial score gradually ramps up in intensity, so does the dance, leading to a frenzy that culminates in collapse — and then a duet with a "partner" that isn't human but that makes perfect sense, given what a mess Meyer's world of sand has become. The ending is funny, strange, sublime.

"Frozen" is, if anything, more intense. A figure naked to the waist (Morand) faces away from the audience, her "dance" stemming entirely from the dorsal activity beneath her skin. Her muscles move and slide in a manner so autonomous and dislocative that you almost forget they're human flesh. Eventually, Morand's hands, elbows and long hair come into play — but her back remains the epicenter. Frenetic though her action grows, her lower body stays frozen, rooted in its spot. Felipe Perez Santiago provides an electronic score that dovetails perfectly with the constrictions/explosions of the dance.

"Caso & Chaos" and "Frozen" repeat Saturday and Sunday on a bill with Selfick Ng-Simancas' "Study for Casio (Reworking)" and Khambatta Dance Company's "La Fin." The first is an excerpt from a full-length "study on pure movement" featuring swift, swiveling work from Sylvain Boulet, Christin Call and Ng-Simancas himself, who can be slinky, regal and primal all in a single dance phrase. He also composed the score.

Festival artistic director Cyrus Khambatta bravely — foolishly? — programmed his company to follow on the heels of Compagnie Prototype Status. "La Fin" sounds variations on apocalyptic themes, with text by spoken-word artist Caleb Penn. A fragmentary score from various sources and Penn's sometimes clumsy pronouncements ("Does it matter when the universe is on dialysis?") made "La Fin" feel choppy. Tough, springy duets between various dancers, however, provided highlights. So did one gnarly ensemble passage, so fast and intricate that someone would have lost an eye if a single kick or duck had been out of place. For my companion, it was the hit of the evening.

Beyond the Threshold takes it outdoors on Saturday afternoon, too, with "Art on the Fly," along three blocks of Westlake Ave. North between Denny Way and Harrison Street. A sampler of what's in store was on display on Friday. Rainbow Dance Theater's Darryl Thomas — a wiry, swooping figure who cuts arcs and planes in the air to the sounds of Bach, dreamy jazz and traffic roar — was especially eye-catching.

The festival continues June 8-10 with a Spotlight on Seattle series (different programs and curators each night), and with a double bill of Rainbow Dance Theater and Japan's maika misumi movement troupe [m3t] June 11-13.

See www.thresholdfestival.org for more details.

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