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REVIEW

ballet.m^{agazine}*Bay Area Tap Festival**'2008 Bay Area Tap Festival'**August 2008**San Francisco, Herbst Theatre**by Renee Renouf*

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This year, Stepology's Annual Bay Area Rhythm Exchange expanded to 2 evenings, August 15-16 at the Herbst Theater in San Francisco's Veterans' Building. If the warmth and size of the audience Saturday night was any indication, two evenings can henceforth be routine for San Francisco's mid-August frolics.

This year older professionals gave way to a slight scenario. I found myself missing historical continuity, yet felt quite

comfortable with an inevitable alternative. John Kloss, thinner than his usually pencil slimness, emerged to provide the audience its usual admonishments - no cell phones, taping, etc.; Sam Weber tapped rhythmic equivalents of the spoken word. They also launched into Kloss' comments with Weber's tapped response assuming a traveling, performing team, giving subtle accents, emphasis, phrasing and pauses both eloquently physical and facial.

No sooner had they finished than the upstage center curtain parted to present Channing Cook- Holmes, serving as master of ceremonies, dishing up charm and phrasing somewhat evocative of Elvis Presley, certainly keyed into front and center effective show biz maneuvers. It was a pleasure to watch Holmes playing the drums, playing for his colleagues, face lit with pleasure at the intricacies rendered by his colleagues.

Deborah Mitchell, short and zoftig in proportion, wearing heavy-duty silver tap shoes, rendered a battery of hoofing sounds, tapped with a jump rope and told stories about her principal mentor Leslie "Bubba" Gaines and his generosity towards her.

John Kloss utilized a chair mid way through his solo which he pranced, tripped and circled around. Kloss seems to have honed his style; while virtuosity remains, a certain grace in presentation has begun to refine sequence and his selections of intricate phrasing.

Then there was Dormisha Sumbry-Edwards. What can I and can not I say about this marvel; subtle body rhythms counterpulsing over intricate tap phrases, slender torso conveying an inborn dynamic pulse which simply cannot be learned. She creates an argument that lila, the Hindu term for divine play, can be witnessed as a universe within a single human body.

Channing Cook-Holmes is a multi-faceted entertainer, drums, vocals, tap and talk, the latter a bit like unedited stream of consciousness, an effective mc, if his tap works seems heavy.

Holmes was wonderfully effective as the tap master with the other dancers masked as student puppets being rehearsed for a recital, Sumbry-Edwards providing a pert, cheeky note in the dialogue, yielding nothing to egocentric direction.

An unexpected lighting problem brought a small genie, candidate for Snow White's Sleepy, on stage in answer to the emergency call. A couple of taps from the technician allowed Channing-Holmes to retire. Phil Trau unhooked his red tool box; no tools but stairs, which he proceeded to tap upon and up, over and down. The routine was straight out of the earlier glory days of movie musicals; Trau's skill elicited warm applause.

I omitted that Holmes, just after intermission, walked up the right aisle, asking for audience response; he stopped to ask a teacher if he danced, "I clog," was the reply. "Would you do some for us?" "Not without my partners," giving the signal for six Barbary Coast Cloggers to march on stage as guest artists. The sequence ended with a brief, lively challenge and response between cloggers and tappers.

At the program's end , audience members with tap shoes were invited to come to the stage and share in the shimmy-sham. Some five or six of these, assorted races and genders, also tapped short, effective and surprisingly skillful variations.

The musicians, Sista Kee, local pianist with more accomplishments than the evening permitted, Lamont Keller on bass and Michael B. Monring, percussion, gave the dancers musical support that was solid, verging on beguiling.

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written by Renee Renouf © [email](#)

design by [RED56](#)
