

BARNSTORM FEST KICKS OFF WITH DIVERSE LINE-UP OF CONTEMPORARY DANCE

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Joshua L. Peugh and Alex Karigan Farrior in Peugh's *Cosmic Sword*.

Photo by Lynn Lane

The Setup:

This past weekend saw the opening of the inaugural Barnstorm Dance Fest, a three-weekend line-up of contemporary dance presented by Dance Source Houston. Each weekend features a different line-up of dance artists running the gamut of styles and ranging from independent choreographers to long-established companies. What's even more exciting is that the festival, presented at the Barn on 2201 Preston, mixes local and out-of-town talent for a program that feels as comprehensive as it does extensive.

The Execution:

Despite some East End flooding and a 30-minute postponement, Program 1 concluded last Saturday night with a healthy audience in attendance. One reason to brave the water was the chance to see the Houston debut of the much-celebrated Dark Circles Contemporary Dance. Artistic Director Joshua L. Peugh's *Cosmic Sword* proved to be the highlight of the first half. Smart, sexy, and completely adult, Peugh's work was a burst of visual and comic hijinks. The trio of Peugh, David Cross, and Alex Karigan Farrior displayed deftly executed athleticism and expert showmanship in a street dance heavy choreography that conjured funny-bone scenes of a threesome gone terribly wrong.

Austin's ARCOS Dance also gave reason to sit up and pay attention to the out-of-town visitors. Using projections to create a brooding sense of interior reflection, *She, Extracted*. saw some interesting and clever partnering work by the trio of Alexa Capareda, Erica Gionfriddo, and Felicia McBride. Their movement quality was captivating to watch, all fluid motion from one skill to the next, and the projection work fully lent itself to the theme of magnifying oneself from the inside out.

Program 1 also gave Houston audiences another chance to see jhon r. stonks' *Thawing*, performed by METdance. (It was the first time I had the chance to experience.) Set to a re-composition of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* by Max Richter, stonks' choreography explored the inherent beauty of a gentle temperament. The piece started slow and meditative in pace, with soloist Patti Hogan reaching, twisting, and arching around stationary, yet, conscious bodies, bringing them to life with a stream of lovely and sinuous movement.

Once filled with life, the bodies don't stop moving. The METdance's gorgeous dancers push the choreography to its fullest and most generous capacity, while sharing the joy and electric verve of their craft with the audience. The company may have been dressed in green, but I had the impression of a frozen river slowly experiencing the transformative effects of spring. The ice breaks, the water thaws, and the river runs with abandon once more. The ice must thaw, and sometimes the heart does, too.

The Verdict:

Cosmic Sword and *Thawing* were worth the price of admission alone, but also did much to build the anticipation for Program 2 and Program 3. Highlights of the next two weeks includes work by Dionne Sparkman Noble, one half the creative mind of NobleMotion Dance; Lori Yuill, one of three Dance Source Houston artists-in-residence; the fun and cool hip-hop of Kathy Wood's long-running FLY Dance Company; the Houston debut of Annie Arnoult's Open Dance Project; Modern dance maven Jane Weiner's *Flower II: Marigold* set on Texas A&M Dance; and Jasmine Hearn's *mama, am I clean yet?*

The Barnstorm Dance Fest runs through June 13 at the Barn. For more information, visit Dance Source Houston's [Web site](#).