



THE HERALD-SUN/
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA
ADF Pinata Audience Saw Something Special
July 7, 2005

Who needs fireworks when there “Pinata performed by Brian Brooks Moving Company? The choreographer, who attended the American Dance Festival in 1992 when he had a student job on the stage crew, makes a triumphant festival debut with his own company for a three-day run that began Monday. Brooks’ zany brand of humor, painterly sense of design, inventive mind and playful imagination as well as use of repetition, infuse this new work so that the 70-minute dance zips by.

From the opening moment when a donkey piñata stands in a spotlight and “speaks” of turning off cell phones before it introduces the dance, the Reynolds Theater audience knew it was in for something special.

A piñata descends from the rafters and a dancer enters, holds her right hand high and another dancer places a stick in it, blindfolds her and spins her around. She smashes the piñata and confetti rains onto the stage followed by a blizzard of the white stuff.

Throughout the work, dancers cast fistfuls of white, red, orange and green confetti as well as use their bodies to disperse the bits of paper onto a large, white rectangle so that by the time the dance ends, the stage resembles a work of abstract art.

Dressed in white bathing caps and white pants and tops embellished with neck ruffles and feathers, dancers, on their backs, pop their heads, chests and legs up and down at different times to music by Cesaria Evora. The minimalist approach to movement drew even more attention to the beautiful soulful music of longing.

In another section, dancers resemble fish in a dream as a soft quality imbues what must be very physically demanding movements. They tumble, rock on their chests and even use their necks as fulcrums to twist their bodies completely around in a fluid way as though they were sundials created by Salvador Dali.

The strange quality of the movement and repetition usually proves hypnotic and evokes a sense of time standing still. But sometimes being under this “spell” feels somewhat disorienting. Mostly, it’s just plain fascinating and produces a sense of joy based in wonder. This choreographer’s limb imagination keeps you guessing as to what’s coming next. Who would have thought that one section would consist entirely of different piñatas, including a unicorn and a big-eyed, sad-looking fish, moving “magically” across the stage from an oddly touching interlude perhaps because these critters are made to be destroyed.

Brooks, as well as the other company members, Nicholas Duran, Alexander Gish, Jo-Anne Lee, and Weena Pauly, exhibit strong physical ability, intelligence, a keen sense of rhythm and a willingness to take risks (that confetti, as it turns out, can be quite slippery, according to dancers in a post-performance discussion on Tuesday). This small company also communicates an esprit de corps nowhere more evident than in the grand finale to Ravel's "Bolero".

This section deserves to become part of the history of modern dance's master works based on both its conception and execution.

In it, dancers use only their hands to interpret every single note from the sinuous wind instruments to the relentless, percussive drive of drums in the Ravel music.

And, what a hand dance! After another piñata smash, it begins as dancers, wearing long black dresses flared at the bottom, stand in a line and watch one dancer move her hands like fish or snakes in delicate serpentine turns. Soon, the other dancers join her and proceed to rap on invisible doors and drums as well as maneuver in endlessly mesmerizing, repetitive sequences.

At one point, dancers' hands resemble birds as they press their wrists together, then furl their hands as quickly as fingers flutter. Since Brooks likes repetition, the audience can always count on seeing his inventive movements over and over.

Speaking of counting, in order to produce the flawless, coordinated, clockwork precision the audience saw Tuesday night, the dancers must maintain a complicated counting system. Still they manage to make it look easy and seamless.

Here's hoping that this company returns soon to the festival.