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'Piñata': The Pot of Gold At the End of the Rainbow

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"Piñata," performed Saturday night by the Brian Brooks Moving Company, is the last in a series of works in which the New York-based Brooks has explored color -- he previously created an all-pink work (Dance-o-Matic) and an all-green one (Acre). In this latest piece, presented at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, colors are combined, yet his canvas is painted one hue at a time, creating a visually stimulating and humorous whole.



The piece begins with the five dancers clad in white on an immaculate white floor. The costumes impart a sense of whimsy: Shirts have flamboyant ruffles around the necks or on the shoulders, and some dancers wear what look like feathered swim caps. Lying shoulder to shoulder, the dancers lift their heads, then their torsos, to the upbeat music of Cesaria Evora. With incredible full-bodied pops off the floor, they remain horizontal, even in the air.

A scene from Brian Brooks Moving Company's colorful "Piñata."

(By Briana Blasko -- Brian Brooks Moving Company)

The planes the dancers move in, from horizontal to vertical, and the directions they travel, straight and on the diagonal, are presented clearly and simply in the work. The color orange is introduced as the dancers, one by one, travel upstage in a repeated hopping movement. Other colors are added -- blue confetti is produced out of dancer Weena Pauly's pockets, as she is gently moved by two male dancers. The section, performed to original music by Tom Lopez, is stunning in its simple beauty. Piñatas themselves take the stage to Cyndi Lauper's "True Colors." Pulled in a somewhat jerky fashion with fishing line, they add a ridiculous element.

Red, green and yellow sections precede the finale, when the dancers don black flamenco-style dresses. To Maurice Ravel's "Bolero," the troupe performs a ballet of hand movements. For 16 minutes, dancers' hands carve through, knock at and sculpt the air. In an era of short attention spans, Brooks reminds us we can cultivate awareness if we take the time to really look.

-- Kirsten Bodensteiner