

GIORDANO JAZZ DISPLAYS HIGH ENERGY IN A RANGE OF DANCES

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ALBANY -- Don't let the name fool you. Giordano Jazz Dance Chicago, which performed Thursday evening at The Egg, may have jazz in its roots and its repertory, but this is a Renaissance company. These 10 dancers can do everything, from modern dance and ballet to hip hop and, of course, pure Broadway jazz.

Founded in 1963 by Gus Giordano, who died last year, and now run by his daughter Nan, the company is 46 years young, boasting technical versatility, a sunny disposition and a fabulous repertoire of works by many different choreographers. The dancers, a diverse and beautiful bunch, ignite chemistry not only with each other but also with the audience.

The program opened with a new work, "Brand New Day," a crowd-pleasing tearjerker set to a song of the same name that was written by composer Ira Antelis for Chicago's Sacred Heart Schools and recorded by a chorus of children and adults to benefit the school's scholarship fund. The choreography by Lindsey Leduc Brenner (who is also a dancer with the company) is a perfect match for all that positive energy: outstretched arms, leaps, gentle partnering and harmonious ensemble work. The piece begins with the dancers (Brenner, Maeghan McHale, Zachary Heller, Robert Mckee, Craig Kaufman, Cesar Salinas, Jarrett Kelly, Meredith Schultz, Meghan McDermott and Ashley Lauren Smith) scattered throughout the audience, dancing in the aisles -- a nice metaphor for unity and togetherness.

"A Ritual Dynamic," from 2007, showcases the dancers' speed and power as well as their easy integration of forms and styles, including angular solos, one-handed hip-hop moves and African dance phrases.

Duets are the central theme of "Give and Take," which unfolds in unison and canon sequences. The choreography and attitude glide from elegant and sexy to angular and jazzy.

Salinas performs turns and balances with gorgeous articulation and power in "Wings," a 2008 reconstruction of Giordano's 1978 solo, set to Joan Baez's resonant version of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." McHale also has some amazing moves in Sherry Zunker's "The Man That Got Away" (sung here by Judy Garland), but she plays them for

bittersweet laughs as her high kicks and huge splits have no effect whatsoever on the immobile Man (Mckee).

Piano music by George Winston sets the tone for the first half of "Pyrokinesis" (2007), a stately arrangement of changing patterns splayed on the floor and across the stage. The second half, with music by the Japanese acid-jazz band United Future Organization, is something altogether different: an explosion of rolls, slides, pirouettes, jazz squares and cha chas that spotlights the charm and strengths of each individual performer. If only we could bottle the heart, soul and spirit of this incredibly likable company.