



## Slaves to the Rhythm

By Gus Solomons Jr.

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Two exciting dance makers — Nicholas Leichter and Larry Keigwin — both irresistibly driven by rhythm, are sharing a week at the Joyce Theater, alternating days.

Both represent New York-style, highly physical, buoyant, joyful dancing with an intriguing edginess lurking just beneath the highly entertaining surface. But each has a distinct and distinctly appealing choreographic voice.

Since its founding in 1996, Nicholas Leichter Dance has been exploring the territory between the vocabularies of concert dance and of vernacular movement. For his Joyce Theater debut, Leichter's new "Killa" asks, according to the company release, "how dance music, from B-boy to House, Punk-Funk to Reggaeton, functions both as a social and political force."

Leichter overlays funky, elbow-flapping, crotch-grabbing moves — an infectious mix of hip hop, West African, and disco-drag — with references to money, politics, and fashion. Wall Street meltdown, unemployment anxiety, war, and platform high heels are all in the mix.

In the section he calls "the routine" — down-and-dirty Afro-disco — the cast wears what he calls "camouflage-couture, ready-to-wear, mesh-with-a-bra, black-glasses, total Iraq chic." Leichter explained, "And then I hope I can get us blinged out for the 'chicken dance.' The hard part is figuring out if we can change clothes that quickly."

Music by Basement Jaxx, M.I.A., and Lionrock, and live performance by Monstah Black — whom Leichter refers to as "our fearless drag leader" — drives "Killa." In fact, Black's fabulousness partially inspired the work. "In the concert world," Leichter said, "you don't go onstage unless [the dance] is tight, but [in drag culture] their idea is, it's the outside first; Monstah's whole thing is 'You don't go onstage unless you look good!'"

Sharing the limelight in "Killa" will be students Leichter discovered at Sacramento and Wayne State Universities during residencies there, who he said can do anything. Besides being sensational dancers, he noted their generational tendency not to draw value distinctions between high- and low-brow, freely mingling styles. Street dance rubs elbows with art dance — no judgment. Leichter observed that gender lines are blurring as well for tweens and Gen-X-ers. "Like with [David] Bowie," he said, "you can wear high

heels, gay or straight, it doesn't matter.”

Leichter is also remounting and updating his “Free the Angels” (2001), featuring several of the original cast members.