

Choreography risks pay off for Sketch

By Claudia Bauer



David DeSilva

Amy Seiwert's company Imagery performs in the premiere of "Shutter," choreographed by Jennifer Archibald of New York for Sketch 8 at ODC Theater.

Risk is scary; that's why they call it risk. A lot of artists avoid it, and who could blame them? Amy Seiwert charges toward it, and she's made it the point of Sketch, her annual summer choreography lab and performance. Invited ballet-based choreographers identify something they're afraid to try and use that as a theme for creating something daring on Seiwert's company, Imagery.

"You're not here to see the most perfect pieces we can create, you're here to see us risk," Seiwert said during a

pause in Sketch 8, which opened Thursday, June 28, at ODC Theater. The triple bill featured works by Seiwert and New York's Gabrielle Lamb and Jennifer Archibald in their Bay Area debuts. Lamb is a Princess Grace Award honoree and the founder of Pigeonwing Dance; the founder of Arch Dance Company, Archibald lectures in acting at Yale School of Drama and is Cincinnati Ballet's first female resident choreographer.

Some people's less-than-perfect work is still outstanding, and all three Sketch pieces showcased inventive artists with focused vision and the skill to build cohesive structure around the chaos of experimentation.

Lamb challenged herself to try a more collaborative choreography process, and "Lacunae," set to modern folk by the Estonian singer Maarja Nuut, felt organic and intimate. This was full-body dancing, not in an aggressive sense but in that every limb and finger and eyelash of every dancer was engaged in expression. A gentleness suffused the urgent gesturing and weighted floor work and echoed through the pastel costumes (Christine Darch's designs throughout) and subtle lighting (Matthew Antaky).

Archibald employed more pure ballet in "Shutter," creating an angsty juxtaposition of Alysia Chang's double pirouettes and Aidan DeYoung's jetes against dynamic, heaving ensembles. A quadrille of partnered turns came as a jarring reversion to tradition alongside Archibald's marvelous tableaux, like a canopy of arms undulating over Cecilia as she morphed this way and that. The score paired electronica and minimalist piano by Anna Thorvaldsdottir Sesamol and Angus MacRae.

Imagery's eight dancers are imbued with the refinement and ethereal extension of ballet training as well as in-the-dirt postmodern rawness. They deployed both in Seiwert's "Unlocking/Elpis," inspired by avant-



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Amy Seiwert's company, Imagery, performs "Unlocking/Elpis," inspired by avant-garde violist Christen Lien's concept album "Elpis," about the Greek spirit of hope who becomes trapped in Pandora's jar.

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Continuing her recent foray into narrative, Seiwert based her visceral account on Lien's reimagined story line, an empowerment myth that has Elpis claiming her freedom. Lien played live, bowing, plucking and looping her instrument to mesmerizing effect; her spoken exposition was less compelling than her musicianship.

Kelsey McFalls was all anguish as Elpis, doing battle with Joseph A. Hernandez's Zeus. Around them the ensemble of dancers conjured oceans, ships dashed on shoals, stormy winds and fire, and trapped the despairing McFalls in a swath of midnight-blue gauze, like a butterfly in a web. Seiwert dug into the music, choreographing the feeling of it rather than its rhythms and notes; the result was more movement poem than story, an imperfect and very rewarding gamble.

For her next leap of faith, Seiwert takes up the artistic directorship at Sacramento Ballet, starting in July. Sketch will continue, but for now it's a fond au revoir.

Claudia Bauer is a Bay Area freelance writer.

SKETCH 8:

2 and 8 p.m. Saturday, June 30. \$20-\$50. ODC Theater, 3153 17th St., S.F. 415-863-9834. www.odc.dance