



### Performing Arts: Dance

#### COUNTERPOINT

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Few objects, religious iconography aside, carry as many cultural associations as pointe shoes. Their prettiness is undeniable. To receive them is to have earned them. To have them is to have hierarchical status, all the while working diligently behind the scenes to maintain the technique, avoiding the landslide of potential injuries that comes with them. To some they are the West's take on foot binding – an exotic trinket for the male gaze, choreographic or otherwise. At once so elevating and yet so constricting, it is fitting that there be a festival exclusively for rethinking dance's most taken for granted talisman. Counterpointe, now in its third iteration, has brought together a broad spectrum of viewpoints on the matter. An investigation quick to surface was simply that of movement executed both on and off pointe. Julia K. Gleich initiated the conversation with *Intermezzo*. Izabela Szyllinska, an already towering figure, perches even higher above Ahmaud Culver and Lukasz Zieba, who glide in socks. Contrasting mechanics are gracefully exposed in canons. Unconventional partnering focuses less on Szyllinska and more on her feet. Two men grabbing her shoes and placing them at far-reaching ends fails to read as misogynistic struggle thanks to Gleich's abstract introduction. Closing the evening was Katie Rose McLaughlin's *Nouveau* - Alex Schell mirroring Mary Kate Sickel's movements in sneakers. From prances to skips, the movement does not presuppose footwear; it is free to mold to its executor, branching into multiple identities.

Debra Bona plays both roles in Mishi Castroverde's introspective, "losing farther, losing faster." The ease of the "art of losing" in Elizabeth Bishop's villanelle juxtaposes ironically with the technical intricacies of Castroverde's footwork, spinning continuous phrases of weight shifts on purposefully placed feet. After a non-ceremonious removal of her shoes, Bona repeats key motifs barefoot, ever so much closer to the floor. She leaves them behind, having filled them with poetic substance rather than virtuosic metatarsals.

Melissa Padham-Maass's *Scripp 442* comes closest to discovering the pointe shoe's 21st century identity. The trio, built on gestural upper bodies pinned to balletic legs, dismantles any sense of pedestal with Fugazi's husky groove. Inherently decorative, demonstrative arms relieve the shoes from their duty as primary focus to become tools for connecting with the floor when an arm sends a body somewhere new. When the torso demands it, the dancers ride a set of *bourrées*; when a formation changes, walking suffices.

Friday's talkback demonstrated the show's necessity. A brave soul, new to ballet, asked moderator Gabrielle Lamb if the function of pointe shoes could ever be divorced from needing to, in effect, "look good." Attempted answers explained the anatomical command required to balance or roll through the feet, missing the point entirely. Never truly answered, he brought up a frame through which the choreographers, impaired by their training, never peered – an object's nature as itself and nothing more. Perhaps that's one best saved for *Counterpointe4*.

EYE ON THE ARTS, NY -- Jonathan Matthews