Sushi’s ‘Last Dance’ menu is varied; 
Entrees from delicious to bittersweet

At the last minute, the landlord of the ReinCarnation Building that owns the space called Sushi Performance and Visual Art said, “Hold the sledgehammers!” Nobody smashed a wall or grabbed a symbolic chunk of plaster last weekend, but the audience did enjoy some real performance treats.

On Saturday, the most satisfying piece was “And Then We Eat,” by choreographer Lionel Popkin in collaboration with dancer Carolyn Hall, a sensuous, sizzling duet of perfectly balanced culinary and choreographic arts. Seated on the floor like bookends, Popkin and Hall (both nationally recognized artists who have lived and performed on both coasts) gently shoved a small cabinet (a complete mini-kitchen designed by Stefan Fabry) in a subtle display of power. With amazing ease and comfort, they nibbled on snacks, spread out a tablecloth, plugged in a hotplate and prepared a meal. They took turns chopping onions and garlic and as the oil in the skillet heated up, so did their energy and focus. In between tastes from the skillet, they stretched and swiveled their hips, embraced and circled in seamless embraces with magnetic gazes. They were not slaves to their mini-kitchen and as the food simmered they and the delicious smell of the food circled the space. They became loving frog-like creatures and Hall gently crawled all over Popkin as if he were a piece of sweet bread dough. Conjoined, they slid toward their steamy stir-fry and finally nibbled just like they had in the beginning, to start their food preparation ritual again. They shared samples of their sauté with the audience and it was quite tasty. The visual images created within their performance were scrumptious.

“This is a House,” choreographed by Stephanie Nugent, an assistant professor of dance from the University of California, Santa Barbara, combined visual images, text and movement to tell a story of personal history and its relationship to symbols. Nugent and dancers Devon DeRousseau and Charis Haines passed rocks to each other like a family passing heirlooms from generation to generation. Dancers were most impressive in breathy unison as they moved in a simple ritual around squares of light on the diagonal.

San Diego dancer Tonnie Sammartano appeared in a pool of light, slumped in a chair, for “to be brave, to be brave again,” choreographed by Mary Reich, an eerie, internal struggle. Sammartano was pulled out of her chair by her arm and elbow, as if they are possessed. Her portrayal of madness and sadness was frightening and perversely fascinating.

Also on the program were “Division Street,” by Liam Clancy of UCLA, who shared stories about his childhood while he daringly clomped about on stilts, raced on a bicycle and quoted Buddha; “motion-mouth,” directed by Don Nichols and performed by Nichols, Bryce Beverlin II, Reiko Manabe, and Chris Tonelli, a strange mix of percussive clanging, gasps and crawls; and “The Last Dance,” loosely directed by the Lower Left Performance Collective and performed by Jane Blount, Rebecca Bryant, Margaret Paek, Alicla Marvan and Jessica Benson, all of the performers and the audience. Yes, it turned disco and Donna Summer’s “The Last Dance” blasted.

by Kris Eitland

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