

Rhoads finds humor among thieves

DANCE REVIEW | New work probes artistic 'borrowing'

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I had a happy sense of déjà vu as I took my seat at the Dance Center of Columbia College for "Punk Yankees."

Julia Rhoads' brainy if somewhat too "inside baseball" evening-length work is about how choreographers continually "borrow" from those who came before them -- mixing, matching and sampling moves with the same combination of worshipful and greedy appropriation shown by artists in all disciplines, from music to the visual arts. And the déjà vu came because Rhoads had arranged eight metal folding chairs in a semi-circle, immediately calling to mind Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin's brilliant piece "Minus 16," a work familiar to all fans of Hubbard Street Dance Chicago.



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Sure enough, after engaging in a playful audience exchange about some of the themes to be explored during the next 90 minutes, Rhoads and her company of seven danced a bit of Naharin's piece but "reinvented" it to fine comic effect by replacing the Hebrew song lyrics with clever English ones.

From there it is on to a rapid-fire dance history lesson (much too fast for any but the most well-versed dance aficionados to really comprehend); a fleet sampling of Rhoads' own work and that of a slew of other choreographers who either are friends or part of the chain of dance history; a nod to appropriation and issues of race; a suggestion of how TV, film and the proliferation of dance videos on the Internet have only enhanced mimicry (or "artistic piracy"), and more.

A hugely ambitious, humor-filled project, "Punk Yankees" (which, fittingly, comes with two pages of attributions in the program) should become required viewing for all art students. But it would benefit from the use of supertitles or video projections to clue people in on just what "stolen goods" they were watching at any given moment. Of course Beyonce's hit "Single Ladies" is instantly identifiable, but check out just how "pirated" some of its moves just happen to be.

LUCKY PLUSH PRODUCTIONS IN 'PUNK YANKEES'
RECOMMENDED