THE VISIONARY NOTE, so often applied to descriptions of Vaslav Nijinsky, easily persists in the accomplished miracles of speed, agility, grace, and sensuality that articulate the choreography of Rulan Tangen’s extraordinary *Bodies of Elements*. Of Nijinsky, Paul Claudel once wrote, “For a second the soul carries the body, [then] this vestment becomes a flame, and matter has passed.” In Tangen’s work, one can see this effect to its limit, an apotheosis of the oblique, shaped, shaded, and nuanced—in hyperkinetic motion. Performed during the weekend of Indian Market at the James A. Little Theatre, and staged coincidentally during one of the most spectacular lightning storms of the summer, *Bodies of Elements* gathers every major dance trend of the past millennia into a portrait of the world that is as beautiful and disturbing as watching cell division under a microscope. Divided into two acts, it allows the principles of order and disorder to find a kind of grace in one another, and it provides a portrait of a world that can contain you and still let you be, through dance. This is the choreography of apparent randomness that congeals into joint purpose—when the dancers are together, they never lose their spontaneity; when they are apart, you still feel their secret communion. It’s been said that Twyla Tharp, in Deuce Coupe, invented the first cross-over ballet by juxtaposing ballet with her rock-based style; plumb-line pirouettes suddenly melted off sideways, grand battlements were so grand that they knocked the dancers off balance. Tangen’s Dancing Earth ensemble has taken the beauty, power, and wit of that sensibility further, combining powwow, ballet, modern dance, circus arts, capoeira, and b-boying into something acutely mythological: it’s the insolence of America melting into the timelessness of an adjacent memory.

In place of the existential dread of Western cosmology, Tangen proposes a performance ritual that combines a number of indigenous origination stories. The sense of temporal progression begins in the universe, where our planet came into existence, moves into the eras from which our modern world unfolded, and now centers on the time and place where we currently swirl in a jetty of dreams and distorted perceptions. In both movement and story, Act One embodies the implicit and unique urgency that beats at the very heart of dance: the dancer’s entrance. And here we are shown wonder upon wonder—organisms emerge from dying stars, Sky Beings take shape in color, texture, and metamorphosing forms. Bodies surge across a vast stage—all doing what seem to be separate dances—and then a sudden catch, a wave of unison or counterpoint, brings the separate dancers together into an atmosphere of solidarity.

For the end of Act One, Tangen contrives a Fosse-esque *pas de deux* of caged resentment and rebellion, with couples squirming in and out of hellish embraces, all reckless tilts and lunges. Dancing Earth is an international ensemble staffed by a revolving cast of collaborative dance artists. One could imagine that, as a result, one might easily encounter a less than ideal cast. In the case of the Santa Fe performance, none of the dancers danced in any way but beautifully. And this is especially true for Serena Rascon. A native of Las Cruces, Rascon brings to this entirely indigenous creative team of dancers, composers, and visual artists a concern for small, precise movement as well as bolt-throwing power, with a “balletto modern e brutto” attitude that is sensuous, confident, and direct. In Act One, Rascon emerges slowly as an awakening force. By the time Act Two rolls around, she gathers every inch of the stage into the passionate logic of her dancing. But all of Act Two is full of surprises. The musical score, featuring a percussion solo by Barrett Martin, the hoop sequence, the extended range of Tangen’s choreography—mixed with the improvisation and spontaneity of the dancers—all of it is a tribute to the dance knowledge, coaching, and talent contained in this troupe of happy players. As I watched the finale of this irresistible performance, I was reminded of a statement from the memoir of the great ballerina Suzanne Farrell. “I dance for God,” she wrote. “If others wanted to watch, that was their business.”

—ANTHONY HASSETT