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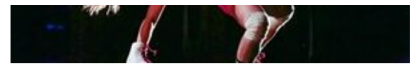
Some funky fun with Sarasota Contemporary Dance



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Rachel Lambright and Monessa Salley of Sarasota Contemporary Dance cut loose with some James Brown moves during "SCD + Reverend Barry & The Funk. [PROVIDED BY SCD / SORCHA AUGUSTINE]





By Carrie Seidman

Columnist

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For its annual live music program, Sarasota Contemporary Dance teams up with the popular local funk and soul band, Reverend Barry & The Funk.



In 2016, Sarasota Contemporary Dance began a tradition of devoting one program of its season to performances featuring live music, the musicians sharing the stage with the dancers. Previously, that has included jazz, tango and 21st century chamber music, but for this year's entry, [SCD decided to get funky](#). Literally.

"SCD and [Reverend Barry & the Funk](#)" gave six of the company's female dancers (including newcomer Jessica Obiedzinski) the chance to cut loose and get down to mostly familiar tunes played by the first-rate local funk and soul band led by bassist and vocalist Barry Nicholson. And while the pairing may have been heavy on nostalgia and short on substance, wasn't that the point? This one wasn't about provoking deep thought or exploring the unfamiliar. It was about having fun.

If you're of a certain age, there was no resisting the venerated tunes — from Sly and the Family Stone's "Thank You" to Earth, Wind and Fire's "Shining Star" — played by this exemplary eight-piece ensemble, which includes three Grammy-nominated musicians (guitarist Mark J. Vincent, female vocalist Yaya Diamond and drummer Ray C. Williams) and a hellacious horn trio (Chris Chiodo on trumpet, Bob Miner on saxophone and Donald Parker on trombone). Nicholson and Tanmart Selby on keyboards round out the octet.

Just as infectious was the playful and clever (if a bit redundant) choreography by SCD director Leymis Bolanos Wilmott and the enthusiasm and energy of the dancers, who seemed catalyzed by the live music to take everything up a notch. It was just the thing to release the stress of the holiday season.

The first half of the show — or "Groove 1" as it was noted in the program — was devoted to a chronological assortment of the greatest hits of funk, a rhythmic, danceable mix of soul, jazz and rhythm and blues that originated in black communities in the mid-'60s. The kickass opener, James Brown's 1968 "I Got the Feelin'," set the tone for the night.

Rachel Lambright and Monessa Salley, dressed in matching multicolored floral men's suits, searched the audience for their tap shoes, then hammered off some impressive percussive footwork, culminating in a series of trademark Brown flip-flop splits. At one point, as Miner's sax wailed, Salley held up the shoulders of Lambright's blazer from behind as Lambright's head rolled loosely as if detached. Brilliant.

For Stevie Wonder's "Superstition," dancers Zoe Austin, Xiao-Xuan Yang Dancigers and Melissa Rummel, wearing either the flowered blazers or the slacks but not both (that's one way to solve a costume shortage) — vied with Lambright and Salley for space on a velvet bench and the funkier upper body isolations.

In the end, Lambright won — in more ways than one. When this petite, blonde sprite joined the company several years ago, she was so timid, self-effacing and hesitant, you had to wonder if she was cut out for this line of work. These days, she's not only the company's confident rehearsal assistant and a promising choreographer, but a magnetic performer with so much charisma and personality in every shoulder shift, she's hard to take your eyes off. She danced in eight of the dozen pieces on this program and lit up every one.

Bolanos Wilmott ("in collaboration with the dancers") choreographed all the work on this program, relying heavily on "props," a method she's long proven adept at tanning creatively but which, seen back to back for 12

"SCD + Reverend Barry & The Funk"

Reviewed December 5 at the Jane B. Cook Theatre, FSU Center for the Performing Arts, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Additional performances through December 8. 941-359-0099 or sarasotacontemporarydance.org

in the work on this program, relying heavily on props, including the long proven adept at clapping creatively, but when, seen back to back for 12 straight numbers, can border on artifice or gimmick. For Tower of Power’s “What is Hip,” she relied on long vividly-colored scarves which Rummel and Salley tied to the waist of Austin, putting her into a kind of cat’s cradle (and occasionally a bind) as she moved.

For Chaka Kahn’s “Tell Me Something Good,” beautifully sung by Diamond, the device was a pair of roller skates, which Rummel donned on stage — first on her hands, then a hand and a foot and finally both feet — as she explored the rolling movement possibilities.

That theme would reappear just before the intermission in the form of Austin, Lambright and Salley scooting around on four-wheeled dollies to Prince’s “Purple Rain.” The best part of this was when Austin and Salley, on foot, stood on either side of Lambright (on a dolly) and swung and swooped her back and forth as if she were a child on a swing.

Other than a finale to Parliament’s “Give Up the Funk (Tear the Roof Off the Sucker)” (“You cannot have funk and not play some George Clinton,” Nicholson insisted), the second half of the program was devoted to the band’s original songs.

The most memorable and poignant of these was “I Would,” a song the band leader said he wrote after he and his high school sweetheart and wife of 28 years nearly split up as he pursued his musical aspirations in Los Angeles. For this rare-in-the-funk-world waltz tempo, Bolanos Wilmott choreographed a lyrical pas de deux for Dancigers partnering a push broom, but to be honest, I got lost in the power and pain of Nicholson’s beautiful vocals.

Likewise, vocalist Diamond stole the show from the dancers on “Wise Man,” a song to a child she wrote and performed “for the little ones.”

It all ended with everyone — audience included — on their feet, clapping rhythmically and boogieing in the aisles. Not your typical funk concert or your typical contemporary dance performance, but a delightful amalgamation of the two.



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