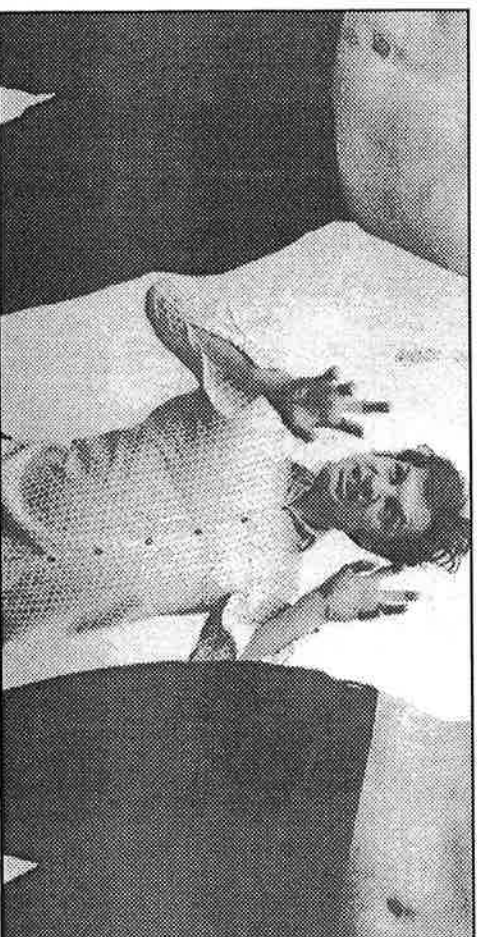


April 2, 1999



Dancer Greg Zuccolo performs in *Hi Everybody!*

By Tere O'Connor

Social movement Tere O'Connor's dancers get it off their chests

BY JOSEPH CARMAN

Choreographer Tere O'Connor has a lot on his mind, and in *Hi Everybody!* he gets most of it off his chest.

During the dance performance, a politically incorrect Greek chorus of over-the-top, flamboyant gay men (O'Connor calls them the "three fags") steps forward with snippets of social commentary; at one point, for example, they ask the audience that school taxes be raised for their children. Other dancers use theatrical asides to vent about what is really bugging them, from family values to popular culture to health care, using poetry, songs, and spoken lines. All the while, as the choreographer brings together social commentary with the theater of the absurd, *Hi Everybody!* "whips you back and forth" between the poles of rage and comedy.

"Sometimes I want to just not make a dance and just put up a banner that says some political thing on it and have people come look at it and leave," O'Connor admits, with a laugh. "The rest of it is just bullshit to get to that."

O'Connor has always felt that theater needs to be a place of catharsis, and *Hi Everybody!* continues his long-time experimentation combining dance, acting, and text to tackle social issues. O'Connor has plenty of opinions, and everything is fair game in O'Connor's performance.

O'Connor, a native of Rochester, founded his own dance troupe in 1986 after attending the State University of New York at Purchase as a dance/theater major, and dancing briefly with Matthew Diamond's company. Most of his early work, he says, combined "political fury with social commentary" in the form of abstract dances that utilized theatrical vignettes. His full-length work *Heaven Up North* dealt with environmental atrocities and quickly earned him a Bessie award for achievement as a downtown choreographer in 1988. He has tackled gay politics before, too: his 1996 work *Mother* explored the maternal and feminine aspects of gay men.

Hi Everybody! has a cast of six performers: four are members of his company (including O'Connor's life partner Greg Zuccolo), and Rob Besseter and Rebecca Hilton will join the group for this performance. With a commissioned score by James Baker, the work uses eclectic styles



By Paula Court

Tere O'Connor's work "whips you back and forth" between rage and comedy.

of dance — ballet, mime, ethnic dance — as well as stand-up comedy to connect the piece's fragmented narratives. There is what O'Connor calls a "multiplicity of image and thought with the dance and text intermingled," as in one section where the characters are enacting the script of a play and dancing at the same time. Some of O'Connor's writing, he says, was inspired by watching re-runs of *Roseanne*.

Gay marriage is one of the central themes in *Hi Everybody!* Although he sees heterosexual marriage being built up as a fiction that people feel they must aspire to live up to, O'Connor says he is particularly appalled at society's denial of marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Talking about gay issues isn't a way of limiting his scope. O'Connor is adamant that "gay issues are involved in world issues," and says he is interested in the way that "gay life meets larger life." Gay rights in his mind can be equated with human rights. But even as he talks about bigotry and hatred and government-sanctioned discrimination, O'Connor says being gay has informed his work from every angle.

"By being marginalized as a gay person," he says, "I found out about love in a way that people who live within formulas don't get to."

Tere O'Connor Dance performs Hi Everybody! at 8 p.m. on April 7-10, at The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. Tickets are \$15. For reservations, call (212) 255-5793.