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Poetry Boy

It's not easy describing how Tere O'Connor mixes abstract movement and raw interior monologue. One California critic threw up her hands, calling him a "weirdmeister," so folks in the heartland must be truly baffled. *Hi Everybody!*, his newest piece, runs from Wednesday through Saturday at the Kitchen. It's just as enigmatic as last year's *The World Is a Missing Girl*, but comes with a ready critique. In a cameo as a portly auteur, O'Connor proclaims his mode "the absurdist-poetic dance theater of the obvious."

Even in jest, the quip sums up his work better than most critics. But why stop there? Judging from rehearsal, he could aptly characterize the fragmented, 45-minute piece as postmodern tragedy, political burlesque, millennial operetta, and terpsichorean farce all rolled into one. Six central figures—from the leader of a grieving group to the fey Poetry Boy—endure such tyrannies as flamenco dancing and assisted-living facilities and decry gay bashing, health care premiums, and global warming.

Over drinks in Soho, the 40-year-old choreographer outlines his heady approach. "The way I've always made dances is autodidactic. It's largely about what is coming out of me. How do I think? How do my synapses go?" Since he first used spoken text in *Mother*, he's written this way, too. One recurring motif is unison, which he sees as a form of oppression. "In dance, you're in unison or you're not, basically, and I try to derive meaning from that in different situations."

O'Connor says *Hi Everybody!* cracks choreographic chestnuts, like diagonal lines and Spanish dancing, that stand in for real emotions. He holds grieving groups in the same low regard. "We have to use the same words even though we want to scream in a different way." The stage isn't much better. "Political correctness has put a filter on pure expressions of rage and sadness. I want to return to classical catharsis in the theater."

—CHRISTOPHER REARDON