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Weekend Arts I

17 DANCE REVIEW

Celebrating 25 years at Big
Dance Theater. BY GIA KOURLAS



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAULA COURT

Big Dance Theater featured a traditional repertory lineup that included the performers Aaron Mattocks, left, and Tymberly Canale as part of its “Big Dance: Short Form” program at the Kitchen.

Spins, Jumps and Props, and One Onstage Party (Twister, Anyone?)

A Ping-Pong table, a game of Twister, cocktail franks heated in a microwave and cans of Budweiser? No, it wasn't your typical intermission.

On Wednesday at the Kitchen, Big Dance Theater turned an ordinary interval into an onstage party to celebrate the group's 25th-anniversary season. As force-fed as it was, it did create a rush of vitality that the works on the program, most of them brief, delivered only intermittently.

The focus in the first half of “Big Dance: Short Form,” directed and conceived by the

husband-and-wife team of Annie-B Parson and Paul Lazar, was on movement-heavy works choreographed by Ms. Parson. (Inspirations included diary entries and folk tales.) The first four pieces were performed in quick succession with set changes conducted by agile cast members in white puffy coats; the aim here was to trade the standard evening-length formula for a traditional repertory lineup, the kind that was alive and well in the 1990s.

Big Dance Theater continues through Jan. 16 at the Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street, Manhattan; 212-255-5793, thekitchen.org.

That's a flaw of the program, subtitled for several of its props: “Stick, Sled, Slippers, Hearth, Bundle, Ball.” Much of the night, which concludes with “Goats” — a more conventional Big Dance production in which dance and theater mingle to retell the story of “Heidi” with a cloying dose of absurdism — feels dated and, at times, slight.

In “Summer Forever,” repeated steps send Tymberly Canale hopping from side to side with carefully angled arms; there's a frantic, dark quality to her rushing patterns that eventually tapers off. Similarly, as concise and emphatic as Aaron Mattocks is in “Short Ride

Out (3): He Rides Out,” the power of his lightning feet gradually turns routine. He later joins Elizabeth DeMent in “The Art of Dancing,” which brings dance-focused passages to life from Samuel Pepys's diaries.

“Resplendent Shimmering Topaz Waterfall,” for Mr. Lazar and Ms. Canale, is based on

notebook notations of work by the Butoh artist Tatsumi Hijikata. Here, Mr. Lazar, his body cloaked in rags, is more diverting than sinister while Ms. Canale borders on glib. The most arresting sight is the set — a suspended bag of ice sending drops of water into a steel bucket.

Taken together, the works are a collection of curios, told intimately and with an assortment of props, which are so integrated they almost become characters; all the same, “Short Form” feels more like an excuse for dancing than a reason for sustaining it. It's the Big Dance we know, but it's hardly big dance.

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