

Dance

TRIBULATION AND THE DEMOLITION SQUAD CHICAGO DANCE CRASH AT THE STOREFRONT THEATER

After the End of the World

Tribulation and the Demolition Squad, an epic narrative dance work by 25-year-old choreographer Mark Hackman, is packed with visceral thrills.

By Laura Molzahn

Sometimes reinventing the wheel is a good idea. Though Chicago Dance Crash's evening-length *Tribulation and the Demolition Squad* has plenty of precedents—Organic Theater's 70s sci-fi epic *Warp!*, pro wrestling, the Mad Max movies, comic books, and gang classics like *The Warriors*—it also feels fresh and unique. And I've seldom seen a dance-theater piece so effectively, authoritatively blend story and movement.

Credit writer-choreographer Mark Hackman. He's created a nuanced, likable protagonist who delivers the tale in voice-over as well as appearing onstage. None of the performers speaks, so without the narration—which is itself pretty oblique—the complicated story and the characters would be obscure. After life as we know it is irrevocably changed by an explosion, our hero—the Antichrist—must deal with a fearsome, chaotic world that has “no teachers, no life-guards, no mothers or fathers,” a state evocative of Henry James's “great greasy sea” of society. But this is an urban place characterized by gangs, drugs, and lots of partying. Initially distancing himself, the narrator suddenly finds a group of four friends:

WHEN Through 6/26: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM
WHERE Storefront Theater, 66 E. Randolph
PRICE \$15
INFO 773-742-8497

ballbuster
Tonya, second banana
Snowball,
dippy
Joanna, and
the gentle
Treble,
who's Tonya's
brother,

maybe. Nothing is very secure in this world, and after one of the friends dies, everything falls apart. Sort of.

Hackman's staging of his story provides a certain amount of ironic distance. With two banks of seats on either side of the playing



Tribulation and the Demolition Squad

area, this is essentially theater-in-the-round, but the Crash knocks down the fourth wall by having some performers interact with the audience before the show and during intermission: one of three dancers representing evil incarnate (dubbed the Demolition Squad) prowls about, stealing personal belongings, leaping onto empty chairs and staring patrons in the face, pulling a chair with an unsuspecting viewer onstage. The voice-over includes muttered instructions to both the performers (“Take your places”) and the audience (“Turn off your cell phones,” delivered in a mildly threatening manner). At other points the narrator is like a rehearsal director, telling someone onstage to go to the center, for instance, turn his head—sorry, do it over.

The story—a secular humanist take on the relatively recent

Christian “doctrine” of pretribulation popularized by the “Left Behind” series—is, let's face it, pretty silly. But the movement, drawing on an array of forms from capoeira and other martial arts to acrobatics to stage combat to modern dance, gives the performance an apocalyptic thrill. When the Demolition Squad came racing in to attack, turning handless cartwheels in perfect unison, the hairs stood up between my shoulder blades. When Tonya delivers a whirling kick to the groin—and believe me, these performers don't hold back—it hurts, even if you're not a guy. And when Sarah Keating as Joanna dances herself into a state of exhaustion in an approximation of classical technique that's increasingly ragged and reckless, it's heart wrenching.

The cast of 22 dancers, acrobats, and actors throw themselves

into their roles, which are all pretty cartoonish except for the narrator. Though Adam Doi initially seems too nebbishy in the part, by the end it's clear it's played that way for a reason. Michael Moran is appealingly puppyish as the morally upright doofus Snowball, Christopher Courtney is calm and imposing as Treble, the petite Keating is appropriately flaky as Joanna, and Marissa Moritz kicks ass as Tonya, a scary but somehow sweet figure in black leather and dreads. Maybe best of all, though, are the Demolition Squad: Jamie Farrell, Christopher M. McCray, and Kyle Vincent Terry. Uniformly strong and sinuous—Farrell, the only woman, holds her own—they stalk and pounce and glare like magnificent lions. The narrator is right on target when he says to us, “You can't wait for evil to come out and start

jumping again, right? *Right?*” McCray also designed the costumes, mostly low-key grunge for everyone but the Demolition Squad, who are decked out in netting that highlights every muscle and is adorned with tufts of fur around the shoulders. The music ranges from Prince and the Rolling Stones to Rusted Root and Elliott Smith.

Tribulation and the Demolition Squad may be a little incoherent—hey, the Bible doesn't make much sense, much less all the miscellaneous lore that's sprung up around it. But it's always intelligent. The narrator's voice is wonderful—deceptively casual, passionate, funny, confiding, self-aware at times, and also self-deluding bordering on clueless. Hackman's creation and perhaps his alter ego, he reveals that the 25-year-old auteur is someone to watch. **B**

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Art

MACERATE AT AROUND THE COYOTE GALLERY

The Rainbow Babies

Fifteen young artists keep it light but not lame.



Untitled oil painting by Frank Ebert

By Bert Stabler

A lot of art today is being made in response to the gaudy late-modernist heroism of the 1980s, represented by people like David Salle, Julian Schnabel, and Jean-Michel Basquiat. The idea behind the current low-key approach is that it's better to be charismatically pathetic than to run the risk of looking cluelessly pretentious. "Macerate" at the Around the Coyote space illustrates the benefits of this potentially disastrous reaction. Addressing the theme of adolescence, this exhibit by 15 artists suggests both the comfortably half-assed, backward-looking conformity of much contemporary art and its gloriously undirected energy and wide-open, approach-

WHEN Through July 1: Thu-Sat noon-6 PM
WHERE Around the Coyote, 1935-1/2 W. North
PRICE Free
INFO 773-342-6777
MORE Closing night, July 1, features a performance and film and video screenings.

able take on sticky issues of self-consciousness. Curated by Currency Exchange (Nicole Sorg and Liz Rosenfeld), "Macerate" is largely a showcase for the kind of half-ironic, half-straightforward youth-nostalgic "rocker" art that's become increasingly common in Chicago's independent galleries over the past five years. Really, the theme of rocker art is always adolescence—white suburban adolescence, that is—and its commodified symbols of belonging and alienation. An almost self-aware parody of atavistic identity art a la Adrian Piper and Cindy Sherman, rocker art replaces propaganda with nonthreatening, digestible imagery. Familiar as its subjects are, though, the variety of media in "Macerate" and its overall lighthearted energy keep it from feeling stale.

Several pieces dealing directly with popular music suggest that something operatic and grandly

affirming in our collective inner child is somehow being stifled. Frank Ebert in his untitled works uses accomplished drawing and painting techniques not to be illustrational or photorealistic but to comment on the endearingly juvenile fetishization of such techniques. In a romantic

of the installation. This womb/tent/dress has a sci-fi dimension reminiscent of H.R. Giger and *Gremlins*. Like Ebert's pieces, Mason's *What I Wore* is justified by its surface finish and brio, its juxtaposition of scrappy and slick, rather than formal invention or cerebral intent.

Many of these artists face the adolescent dilemma that if consumers, art school instructors, and curators in River North or older nonprofit spaces actually like or "get" their work, it probably sucks.

oil painting reminiscent of J.M.W. Turner, he depicts a voguing Cyndi Lauper dwarfed by a plume of what might be a gulf war oil-field blaze. And in a pencil drawing suggesting a *New Yorker* cartoon, he shows a long-haired guitarist hitting a power chord beneath a stone arch being demolished by a jackhammer operator. In Sara Ferguson's *As Big as Missy Elliott*, an electric fan inflates a pink flowered muumuu repeatedly emblazoned with the title phrase, evoking the star's long-bygone days of flaunting her "big ass." In Andy Roche's *Use Your Illusion II*, three monitors display video documentation of an electric guitar performance by a man with a blanket over his head and no pants. The monitors manage to claustrophobically contain the tiny windowless room in which he wanders, strumming his instrument.

Ghosts of performances haunt many pieces as well. Noelle Mason's mutant hoop skirt, *What I Wore After the Bomb: Invisible Hermaphrodite*, is made of olive green tent material covered with fake slime (nylon stockings and casting resin), while a collection of fabric pods attached to it with strings sprawls throughout the gallery; a video of the performance is part

"Macerate" has its share of the sort of trippy mandalas marketed by Day-Glo art factories like Paper Rad and Dearraindrop. James Tsang and Math Bass—the duo Marriage—gave a performance on opening night that included lush animated videos of collaged magical imagery. All that remains of it now are some totemic artifacts—a cute model of a coyote and a golden cane, the latter alluding to the piece's nominal theme of disability. But what's important is the pagan energy associated with growing up and inventing a system of meaning in an anarchic world of overrepresentation. Kathy Grayson's large, Op-esque painting *T-Rex* is a simulated Photoshop version of what might once have been a snapshot of two young children in front of a tyrannosaur skeleton. With the media mimicry typical of this school of art, Grayson imitates a photo altered by a low-fi paint program in which the shapes are traced and then replaced by a bitmap pattern fill. Nearly all the forms are comprised of clashing rhythmic fields of black-and-white shapes, except for the children's arms and faces and one rainbow, the trademark of this style.

continued on page 34

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Art



T-Rex by Kathy Grayson, video used in a performance by Marriage



continued from page 33

In a similar attempt at groovy hypnosis, William O'Brian has rainbows swimming over period snapshots in his attractive video

piece, *A Silent Descent*. In contrast to these instances of distanced nostalgia is Jim Trainor's 16-millimeter animation *The Antrozous*, a lovely loop of zoo-

logical morphs he created when he was an actual high school student in the actual 1970s.

After operating for more than a year as Up the Stairs Gallery,

this space was recently renamed Around the Coyote—and in fact it's always been affiliated with ATC. A modest little venue that shows good stuff, it's neverthe-

less associated with the irrepressible crap market that is the twice-a-year festival. The differences between the festival and the eponymous gallery illumi-

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Ink Well by Ben Tausig

Summer Combing

nate the gulf between Chicago's many bumbling collectors, art faculty, and curators on one hand and, on the other, its frustrated hordes of young artists waiting for our town to catch up with prevailing critical and formal concerns. Many of these artists face the adolescent dilemma that if consumers, art school instructors, and curators in River North or older non-profit spaces actually like or "get" their work, it probably sucks. Just look at the art these institutional tastemakers buy, make, or assemble for shows: obsessed with "good" design, boring, and square.

At the opening, a beer-clutching art lover used stepping on a sculpture as an excuse for starting up a conversation—I almost wondered if he was doing a performance. He said he'd seen a lot of the art at the ATC festivals and found it much more "mature" than this show, which he thought "disappointing." But when he said he'd give it a B-minus, I knew rocker art was in trouble—not for being homogeneous but for being a little too ingratiating. Guys like this should be giving shows like this an F. **Q**

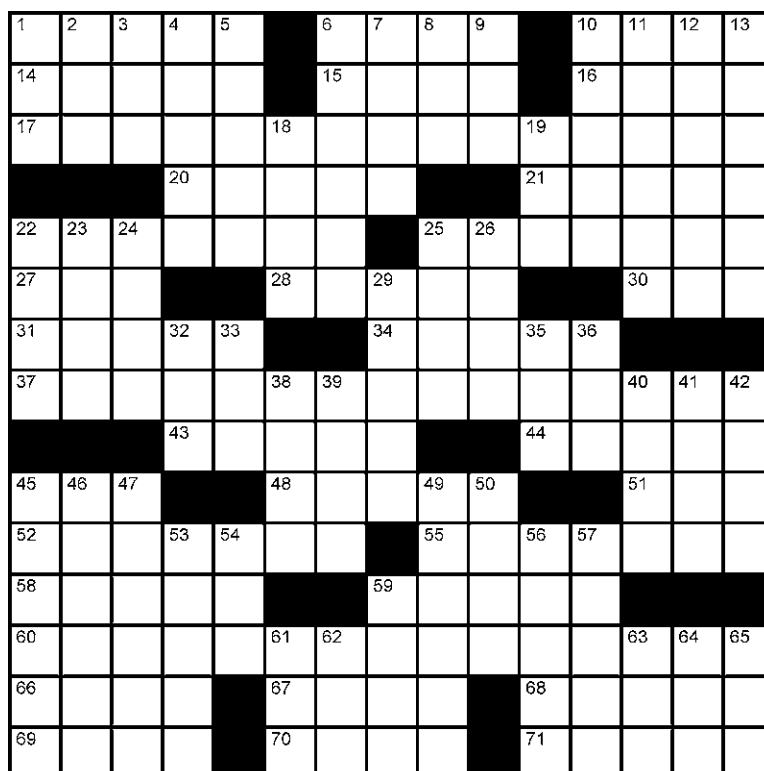
ACROSS

1. OK for dieters, in ads
6. Cabbage salad
10. Jerk's output
14. ___ Gay
15. Prepare to be shot
16. Uno plus dos
17. Certain Oak Street excursion
20. Cold ones in Hamburg
21. In again
22. Side in a point-counterpoint
25. Early adopter
27. LeBron James, e.g.
28. Clucked disapprovingly
30. Doubled, a Ramone
31. Causing overtime, perhaps
34. Beginning of the "Common Era"
37. Good conditions for 17-Across
43. Sales pitch
44. Man, in games
45. Maritime address
48. Camel kin

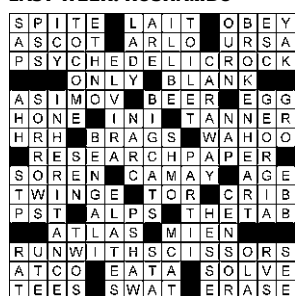
51. Some batteries
52. Michael Jordan, collegiately
55. Pothole, of the Loop
58. The "Punk Princess"
59. Spud state
60. Something to bring for 17-Across
66. Wind indicator
67. Barbershop job
68. Visibly stunned
69. Takeoff guesses: abbr.
70. Sharpen
71. Al ___ (spaghetti spec)

DOWN

1. Meadow
2. Mich. neighbor
3. Side in a point-counterpoint
4. "My hard drive crashed," e.g.
5. Golf gimme
6. Newspaper section
7. Developer's purchases
8. End of a butt
9. Microscopic
10. Dutch master with "The Family Concert"
11. Stood on a soapbox
12. Court order
13. On land
18. Class struggle?
19. Dude
22. Play units
23. "Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)" singer
24. Tel ___
25. Teller's partner
26. Checked a birthday
29. Eucalyptus eater
32. "Mega Man" console: abbr.
33. Econ. measure
35. Venomous viper
36. 1976 citation for Dubya

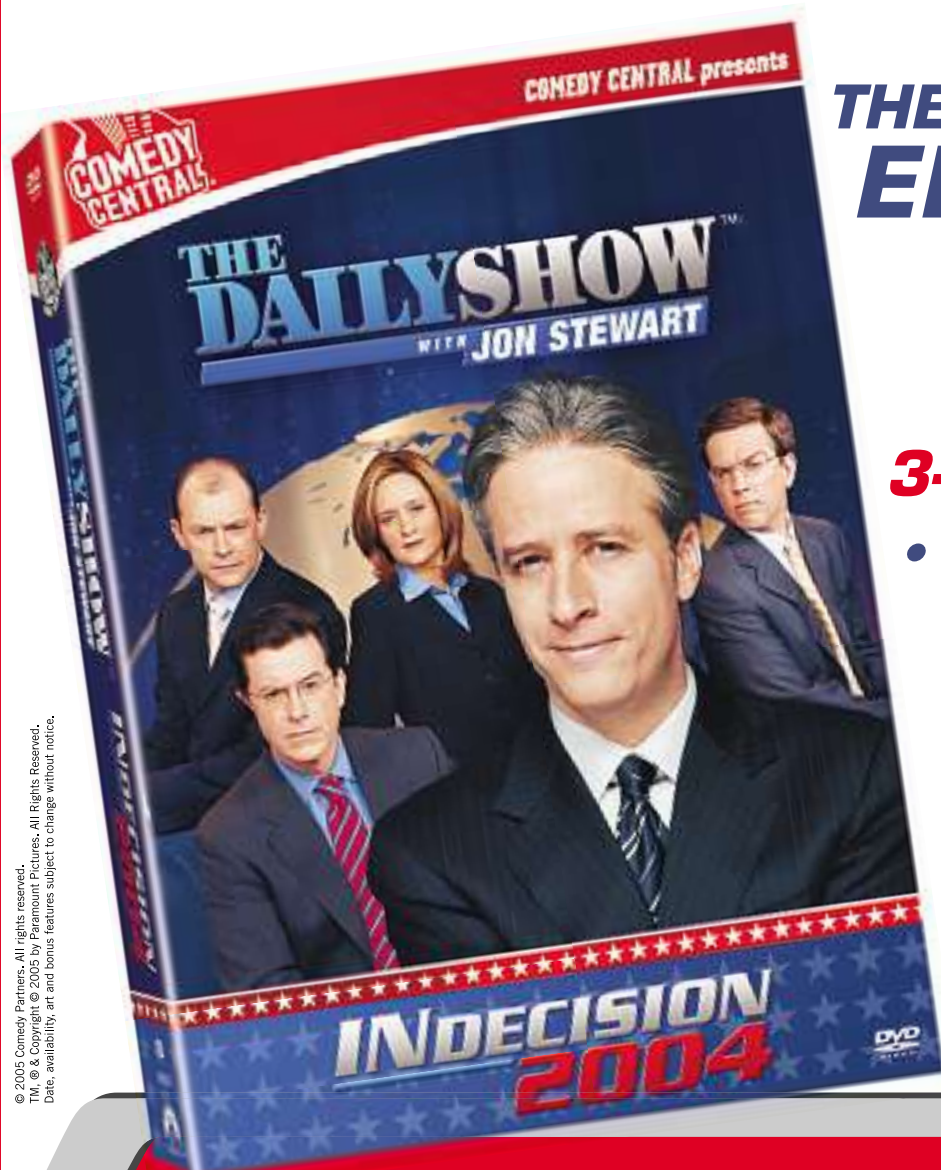


LAST WEEK: ROSHAMBO



38. Linoleum alternative
39. Use an outside voice
40. Dear partner
41. March Madness org.
42. Tom Sawyer's assent
45. Go hungry
46. Attack
47. Task that's run
49. Tussaud title
50. Med. school class

53. Prepares for "it" to finish counting
54. Yalie
56. Winning
57. Chasm
59. Poker player's declaration
61. Advanced degree?
62. A doz. doz.
63. Joy Division's Curtis
64. Befitting
65. Jeans name



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