

*Dance review*

## **Members of Argentine troupe are off, on and above the wall** **The "Air Condition" show harnesses some playful abstractions as well as the dancers**

Saturday, April 05, 2008

by Marty Hughley

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For the past eight years, the White Bird/PSU Dance Series has offered a variety of fresh perspectives on dance. But perhaps no perspective as surprising as that in part three of "Air Condition," a show that opened a three-night stand Thursday in Lincoln Hall.

Over a darkened stage, two crossing beams of light suddenly drew attention to a spot high above the floor. There, poking down from the top of the frame of the stage space, dangled three sets of legs. After a minute or two of twisting and kicking to a score that sounded like a '60s spy thriller in a circus, the legs tipped quickly up and out of view, replaced by heads with bottle-brush wigs of a striking bottle-blond hue. What's down is up and what's up is down. Or maybe not.

Dancers dropping from the ceiling, dancers walking on walls, dancers bounding, hanging, floating -- if contemporary dance is, on some level, about rethinking the movement of bodies in space, the Brenda Angiel Aerial Dance Company gives us a lot to think about.

In its West Coast debut, the Argentine troupe upended the normal spatial perspectives of the proscenium stage with a show full of thrillingly playful abstractions. Featuring a half-dozen dancers often hooked into harnesses, elastic ropes and elaborate overhead rigging, Angiel's ingenious choreography cheats physics for the greater glory of geometry.

The show -- the last White Bird show to be presented at PSU for two years -- ends its three-night run tonight. Angiel has been quoted in newspaper stories as saying she likes to imagine that the ropes and harnesses are not there at all. Granted, the mechanical side of things is so important that the three backstage riggers came out to share in the standing ovation at the show's end. But the show has few moments of Peter Pan-like flying. Instead, the emphasis is on exploring what the rigging makes possible for the aforementioned spatial perspectives, as well as for the way dancers relate to each other in terms of weight, position and so forth.

A key to this approach is a giant, charcoal-colored back wall. At one point in the opening sequence, the harnessed dancers, with their feet against the wall, lean back from the waist: It's a simple motion, yet the appearance is as if we were watching from overhead instead of in front of the action.

The show includes numerous such effects, and their filmic nature is brought into sharp relief in part 12, a solo for Pablo Carrizo in which he dances along the wall next to a image of himself projected at an angle. It's as if Peter Parker's post-spider-bite epiphany had been to dance instead of fight crime.

Even more delightful is the way Angiel re-envision duets. Part eight, called "an aerial tango," stays close to earth, yet the rigging allows Ana Armas to glide with her toes barely on the floor, and her leaps into Carrizo's arms make her look like a bird floating up to perch on his shoulder. By freeing the dancers from the need to make steps in order to cover ground or change their position, their other movements take on a new richness, such as in part nine, a sort of right-angle cha-cha for Leonardo Haedo and Cristina Tziouras. And some of the choicest partnering comes with one dancer in harness and the other floor-bound, shall we say.

It's tempting to be distracted by the technical and physical aspects. But, aided by David Ferri's inventive lighting design and a terrific score by Juan Pablo Arcangeli and Martin Ghersa, the show creates such a dreamlike atmosphere that the magic takes effect even as the magician's method remains in plain sight.

There's also enough stage fog used that the audience on Thursday began to laugh as each new wave of mist rolled toward it. But even with that, "Air Condition" is a blast of fresh air indeed.