



## Fertile Desert

August 2, 2007

by Geri Jeter

Annual dance concert steps up

**This past weekend**, the College of Southern Nevada presented the ninth annual Dance in the Desert Festival. The three mixed-repertory programs covered a lot of dance territory—from various forms of modern dance and ballet to tap, from bordering on the trite to the profound, from the technically amazing to the likeable and earnestly amateur. The program pacing was balanced, and the performances offered a broad range of dance experiences.

Each year brings back favorite dancers and companies, while introducing new artists to festival attendees. Performances by the returning Nannette Brodie Dance Theatre offered two premieres and one past favorite. One of the new works, the sweet “Almost a Waltz,” provided the dancers with the opportunity to explore their more lyrical side; another premiere, “Seen from Below,” was less successful. An intriguing work-in-progress, it focused on the use of props, lighting and horizontal planes; however, it needs further development.

Desert Dance Theatre, another favorite company from past years, brought Lisa Chow and Step Raptis’ exploration of committed relationships. Alternately sentimental, argumentative and genuinely amusing, the dancers engaged the audience with their courtship, battles and reconciliation antics.

Arts festival audiences love to discover new talent. This year, a new company, Eclectica Entertainment, made its first festival appearance. Company choreographer Javier Gonzalez, whose “Faces of Frida” debuted on Friday, is a gifted storyteller. The work was sexy, strong and poignant, and portrayed the essence of Frida Kahlo as revealed through the dance’s effective visuals and concise choreography. Each dancer portrayed a facet of the artist, separately and together as the various aspects overlapped one another, eventually integrating into the whole person. The characterizations by Gonzalez and dancers Amanda Avis, Sher Borell and Stephanie Chadwick, clearly communicated the nonlinear work’s narrative thread, even without program notes.

The Festival also showcased virtuosic dancing. Special guest Peter Kyle, a technically proficient and engaging performer, performed his own work, along with that of guest choreographer Murray Louis. The movements for these dances were small yet consequential, and both pieces displayed a whimsy that accompanied Kyle’s considerable technical mastery.

In contrast, “Gabriel’s Sorrow,” choreographed and danced by Bernard Gaddis, provided a sweeping dramatic exploration of the pain of loss. Whisper quiet, even in the largest and most explosive moves, his commanding solo combined power with a luminous grace in this deconstructed “Dying Swan.”

Other highlights included: Tony Coppola and The Coppola Tap Ensemble, who perked up the crowd with “Tappin’ the Source”; liturgical dance company Saving Grace, though lacking in technical proficiency, were engaging in their joyous expression of faith and spirituality; Marko Westwood with his skillful use of the human voice as his rhythmic base; and festival director Kelly Roth’s Concert Dance Company, which revisited his “Group Suite” from 2000. Although the piece is based in an abstract and introspective form of dance, Roth’s secure and subtly erotic duet with Allie Lincoln moved the performance beyond mere intellectual exercise.

**Dance in the Desert Festival**

\*\*\*1/2

College of Southern Nevada

*July 27 and 28, 2007*