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Dance Review

Dancers play with food and dreams

By Leah B. Green

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A popular theory makes a connection between meals and dreams — between daytime enchiladas and nighttime zombies.

"Prix Fixe," a double billing of dance theater by UW professors Peter Kyle and Robyn Hunt, makes much ado about this subconscious connection between imagination and bodily function.

Kyle's "Skippy-O's Dream" and Hunt's "Phototrope" both employ handy dream devices as a license to cast off everyday constraints and dive into imagery. Kyle and Hunt — aided by cell theory and dancing chefs — both raise the question of just who lies at the center of our universe as they point a microscope on perception.

Were "Prix Fixe" a dream, then the preceding meal might have been something like paint chips in a light cream sauce — the paint chips provided by Kyle's absurd, cerebral "Dream," and the light cream sauce compliments of Hunt's contemplative "Phototrope."

The title "Skippy-O's Dream" comes from Cicero's "Scipio's Dream," in which Cicero speaks of dreams, relativity and world domination. Kyle molds this with the writings of cell theorist Sir Robert Hooke and an ensemble of so-called "Tinies" — monochrome Lilliputians who flit in and out of Hooke's perceived world as he waxes theoretical about the fallacy of human knowledge.

"Dream" and its sense of physical absurdity inspire giggles as often as deep thought, certainly a victory for something inspired by a Roman rhetorician and a bitter 17th-century cell theorist.

The clownish Tinies embody those ambiguities that lie outside perception — inexplicable phenomena like love, the human body and Broadway-style musical numbers. Interconnected yet autonomous, they are manipulative as often as manipulated.

Hunt's answer to Kyle's Gulliver-world is "Phototrope" a similar exploration of the whimsical and the meditative.

"Phototrope," ostensibly about dancing chefs who argue form vs. function, quickly becomes a tai chi exercise in dance-poetry at the hands of a solemn chorus of "Patrons." Undulating in hunger and waxing rhapsodic with the poetry of David Wagoner and Gary Soto, the Patrons bridge basic needs with imaginative impulses, for an effect that is alternately original and precious.

Hunt and Kyle's endeavor into the blurred genre of "dance theater" makes a fine advertisement for the use of dancers as actors and vice versa.

The ensemble cast displays commendable concentration for the minutiae of individuality in congress, and the result is an intelligent, well-conceived playground.

"Prix Fixe" By Peter Kyle and Robyn Hunt.

Through Saturday at On the Boards Studio Theater, 100 W. Roy St., Seattle. \$12. 206-217-9888.