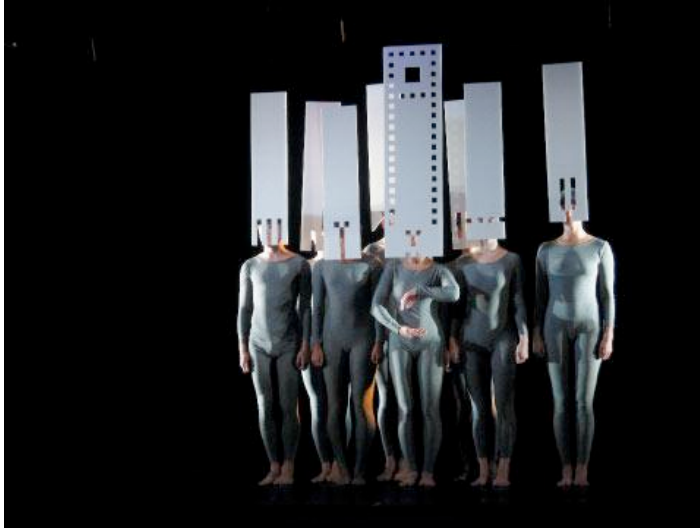


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## The Only Tribe

**3LD Art & Technology Center.** Created and directed by Roland Gebhardt. With ensemble cast. 1hr 5mins. No intermission.



**VERTICAL REALITY** The masked ensemble wears odd headgear. Photograph: Sheree Hovsepian

A gang of buildings gathers defensively around its top dog, a skyscraper. Nervous creatures with stylized hammerhead-shark noggins tiptoe in a line as the stock-market ticker scrolls across their “faces.” Where on earth are we? This is mask designer Roland Gebhardt’s bizarrely compelling multimedia dance-drama *The Only Tribe*, a wordless piece exquisitely choreographed by Peter Kyle to Stephen Barber’s intense, clever score.

Locked behind a scrim on a blank stage, dancers in geometric masks group and cluster, seeming to enact a universe of social dynamics. At times, the company could be a Greek chorus without its text, as the bodies operate as a living city in one moment and as beasts in the next. Sadly, the designers have to compete with spatial limitations—3LD’s low ceilings hamper the pursuit of clean stage pictures. (I spent a lot of time worrying that the taller dancers were going to bonk their masks on the lights.)

Video designer Reid Farrington does outstanding work with abstract images: Early on, he sends stripes of red light across the scrim, making the company look like a Russian supremacist painting come joyfully to life. But the piece suffers as the images move away from the formal, Merce Cunningham–in-*Biped* aesthetic toward something more literal (like Farrington’s lackluster projections of a Dunkin’ Donuts sign). It’s best when we are swamped with associations of our own making, seeing the masks as piano keys or book spines or mating planaria. And how many times do you get to see that?