

# 2 Out of 3 Ain't Bad

by Caroline Hall Otis

**S**elf-indulgent improvised self portraits . . . dramatic expressionist modern dance solos and duets . . . fiery flamenco at the Guthrie . . . Last weekend's local dance offerings were a wildly varied lot in both style and quality.

Flamenco dancer and guitarist Susana and Michael Hauser and their Zorongo Flamenco company have been performing regularly on area stages for years, but their Sunday night Guthrie debut was a stunning surprise for me. Susana, with guest artist Manolo Rivera, takes the traditional gypsy dance form to new choreographic heights. She was the dramatic centerpiece of "La Fragua," a three-part work set in a murky church-like atmosphere with altar candles and incense, village maidens, musicians, and two wailing flamenco singers. Her gut-wrenchingly passionate yet thoroughly controlled performance turned what could have been melodrama into a hypnotic and moving experience for the rapt audience.

Susana's got it all—the proudly arched back, long swirling hair, gracefully circling hands, percussive heels, precise isolations of hip and shoulder, and saucy head gestures—and then some. "La Fragua" was a knock-out.

And so was the rest of the show. Rivera was forceful and charming, tapping and clapping syncopated rhythms with bullfighter bravura flauntingly sensual while partnering Susana. Mezzo soprano Cynthia Munzer delivered seven traditional Spanish songs nicely, and guitarists Michael and Anthony Hauser and singers "La Cordobesa" and Dominico Caro shone, both as soloists and as accompanists for the dancers. A splendid evening, all in all, climaxed by a well-deserved standing ovation. Ole.

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Less impressive was Patrick Scully's "A Personal Good-By." Scully, a founding member of the area's only contact improvisation group, Contactworks, bid farewell to the Twin Cities with seven solo performances at the West Bank Firehouse last week. Sponsored by Contactworks in conjunction with Gay Pride Week, the concerts opened with Scully's off-hand and off-key delivery of "Falling in Love Again," while he swept the stage and carried on meandering one-sided telephone conversations with a lover. Scully is generally ~~a joy to watch~~, but the free-flowing structure of this piece didn't have enough direction to hold my attention; it was as if Scully were a bored little kid alone in a room trying to amuse himself, constantly distracted, never concentrating. The monologue didn't develop, and Scully's movements were limp and half-hearted—oddly spaghettiish given his tall, lean frame and powerful limbs. It takes considerable nerve to subject an audience to such aimlessness. ~~Scully is undoubtedly a brave performer with an engaging personal presence~~, but we needed to see more.

The second half of the program featured Scully slowly peeling off his clothes, then walking, rolling, and stretching behind scrimmed projections of various portions of his anatomy. Scully in the buff is quite beautiful and so were many of the slides, revealing the subtle clean curve of a haunch or buttock, the arch of the dancer's long neck, his tapered torso. After the initial jolt of full nudity and the first several slides, however, the impact of the piece diminished. Was this a paean to the beauty of the gay male body? Okay, but gay or straight, the bodies are similar, and I would have liked to see Scully extend his a little more, invest in some big, imaginative moves. Scully is



Photo: Glenn Osmundson

Patrick Scully's aimless improvisation

known as a contact improviser, giving and receiving movement impulses from surrounding bodies. Performing alone, he seemed tentative and kinetically uninspired, although his improvised performances may have been more interesting on other evenings.

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Jennifer Donahue and Billy Siegenfeld, who appeared at Walker Art Center Saturday evening, already have their act blissfully together. The couple, married since 1976, were both long-time members of the Don Redlich Dance Company, and have branched out in the last few years to teach (Siegenfeld is in residence at the University of Minnesota this summer) and present concerts of their own choreography.

Siegenfeld is dark, athletic and wiry; Donahue is lean and aristocratic, with an astonishing dramatic range. Their dances are solidly-crafted around well-developed themes, some humorous, some not, such as Donahue's solo "Voices," a terrifying portrait of demonic possession. Sitting on the floor, her body jerks abruptly, head bobbing like a palsied animal. She rises, falls, smiles maniacally, and finally twists her mouth into a tormented "O" and slips to the floor, cheek twitching.

"Nest," a duet choreographed by Siegenfeld, was a radical change of pace. Here Donahue beats her chest and struts like a sway-backed

pigeon, cooing and cheeping. Siegenfeld, looking like a sincere penguin, courts her with loud squawks. They meet, part, join again, peeping and honking as their awkward friendship develops.

The couple demonstrated a more sophisticated courtship in "A Swell Soiree," a subtle takeoff on boy-meets-girl in the big band ballroom, with Siegenfeld boyishly debonair and Donahue alternating between tough tootsie and star-struck romantic.

The pair's dramatic and comedic acting talents in these pieces was enhanced and often eclipsed by their spare and glorious dancing. The Redlich style is one of stripped-down expressionism—arms and legs carve clean lines through space, hands are relaxed and connected, and bodies are grounded in preparation for falls or elevations. Concision is the key. Donahue and Siegenfeld don't flop around on stage, as was evident in their taut-edged "Quartz Contentment." Nor do they walk casually from phrase to phrase. Instead, all movement is connected, flowing with invisible transitions around the thematic material of each piece. The impact of the couple's performance was heightened by terrific costumes and lighting effects. Walker Art Center scored again with Donahue and Siegenfeld.

And two hits out of three performances ain't bad for one weekend.

