

# Contact Work Group

by Allen Robertson

A recess from inhibitions, contact improvisation, the newest sport *cum* art on the scene, is creative playtime for adults. A performance by The Contact Workshop is a bit like tuning in the Olympics on TV. There's plenty to ooh and ah over, but not much to think about.

Contact improvisation must feel great to do. How much fun to be so loose and free. How wonderful to be so open and trusting, to be able to put such complete faith in the support—both physical and mental—of one's teammates. The drawback, as with all improvisation, is that the doers seem to get more out of it than the watchers. Participation appears to be the name of this game.

Last Friday was the first public performance by The Contact Workgroup, the Twin Cities major, but not our only, contact improv group. Beyond the initial ground rules of what an individual number is going to be (solo, quartet, what have you), everything that occurs—the lifts, the falls, the handstands, jumps and somersaults—is indeed improvised. For the viewer, the performance—like any game—becomes a series of moments: of possibilities spotted and taken, or not seen and passed over; of chances dared and won, or occasionally fudged and lost.

What contact improv is not, is choreography. While this form of on-the-spot creativity can produce

delightful, remarkably fresh instants, it can also slip into unimaginative dry spells. All the advantages/drawbacks of spontaneous combustion creation are here. It can be exciting, but without the organization of an outside eye, without the shaping vision of a choreographer, it's easy to get burned. It's hard for the participants to gauge the overall dynamic flow of a piece, to assure against repetition or to push themselves beyond the comfortable and into the daring.

Not that ~~these performers~~ aren't daring. Far from it. They ~~take chances with their bodies that most of us can only dream about. They are as convinced and convincing of their ability to fly as any athlete is.~~ What bothered me about this evening is that for all its improvisation it quickly took on a predictable tone. Everything started to look like everything else. By ten o'clock it had all run together into a blur; a rambunctious, energetic blur, but a blur nonetheless.

The flashiest of the Workgroup's players is Pat Scully, all six feet, eight inches of him. ~~He has the abandonment of a city kid at the beach and, as with any kid, he's determined to make the utmost of his holiday.~~ Todd Lund is a polar opposite. Joining the game politely, he moves into situations with a natural deference. Lund's a supporter, a giver, a sort of backbone to Scully's off-the-wall shenanigans.

Wendy Oliver seems to be the most flexible person in the group.



She's the one who initiates the largest variety of activities, the one who goes for little moments as well as the big ones. Whitney Ray rides the waves. Like a good surfer, she has an unflappable, adaptable composure. No matter what happens, she goes with it without being thrown off balance.

Joanne Tillemans, the Workgroups' fifth member, played the evening from the bench. Her arm is in a sling from a badly misjudged fall she'd taken juring the previous day's warmups.

Ultimately more sport than art, contact improv requires some

mental adjustments on the audience's part. We have to think more in terms of soccer plays than Shakespeare plays or pas de bourees. If you'd like to find out if you're a potential fan, the Workgroup will be playing Saturday and Sunday at 8 p.m. in the second floor studio at 120 North 4th Street.