

Chicago Tribune

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Dance Chicago, as usual, keeps audience on toes

By Sid Smith
Tribune arts critic

Even loyal fans of Dance Chicago don't know exactly what to expect: In its dozen years at the Athenaeum Theatre, this plucky, month-long festival has been many things, but predictable isn't one. Go in, sit down and prepare to be thrilled, perplexed, challenged ... and here and there disappointed. But never bored.

Beginning its 13th installment Friday, Dance Chicago will feature some 450 dancers in 30 performances spread out over the next five weeks—easily the most diverse and compact showcase of local dance. Troupes include River North Chicago Dance Company, Deeply Rooted Productions, Giordano Jazz Dance Chicago, Trinity Irish Dance Company and dancers from the Joffrey Ballet, Stick and Move Dance Crew.

It is a home to adventure and this year is no exception, with new endeavors joining such favorites as the interactive contest "Dance Slam" (Nov. 13, 20, 27 and 28) and the fun and family friendly "Dance for Kids, Too" (Nov. 3, 10 and 17). New ventures include "Extended Views" (Nov. 7 and 14), devoted to three choreographers; "Stars of Dance Chicago" (Nov. 16 and 18), a pick-up group formed to show off and tour select works from past Dance Chicago fests;

and "Anything Goes: The Ann Barzel Entertainment Award Show" (Nov. 29), a competition promoting comic choreography.

The last is in honor of the late, venerable critic, an ardent fan of local choreographic funnyman Harrison McEldowney. "Ann always cited his work when asked to describe the kind of dance she'd like to see more," recalls John Schmitz, Dance Chicago artistic director and its co-founder with the late Fred Solari. "That's hard to encourage. So we're bringing together some contestants we picked through DVDs, and we'll collect a few more during the festival."

A panel of judges picks the winner. Schmitz sees the competition as a greenhouse: "I'm hoping over the years to build up a Second City style collection of humorous dance pieces."

Two programs draw on the fest's past, but with new twists. "Extended Views" puts more at-

DANCE CARD

Dance Chicago

Diverse, compact—and a home to adventure
When: Friday through Dec. 2
Where: Athenaeum, 2936 N. Southport Ave.
Price: Varies per program; 773-935-6860 or www.dancechicago.com for full schedule and information



Gauri Jog is part of the International Rhythms program at the Dance Chicago fest.

tention on favored choreographers; Dance Chicago's programs of original work typically boast four or more. But these programs give a little breathing space to a choice trio with long and proven track records: Jon Lehrer and Dmitri Peskov (Nov. 7) and hip-hop specialist Viola Elkins (Nov. 14).

"People tell us that we've invested in these people for so many years, so let's see more of their work," Schmitz says.

"Jazz Fusion" offerings (Nov. 23-25) will sample the new style termed footworking (mixing hip-hop, Latin dance, jazz and stepping). "The urban dance movement is alive and well out there in the parking lots," Schmitz says in a nod to the street spirit of "Jazz Fusion."

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