

# REVIEW: Harvest Chicago Contemporary Dance Festival

★★★<sup>1/2</sup>

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**Laura Molzahn**

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

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**E**verybody knows the perils and pleasures of the grab bag. You might fall in love with the tacky little trinket from the dollar store, or be left cold by the well-made objet d'art.

Now in its fifth season, the Harvest Chicago Contemporary Dance Festival tempts with its pleasant surprises but can also disappoint. This year's programs at the Ruth Page — each of the three completely different from the others — showcase 26 artists or companies, the slight majority from Chicago while others hail from around the country.

Opening night, Friday, was as usual a roller coaster ride, revealing a wide range of ingenuity and talent in eight pieces, each featuring a different choreographer and performers.

Ventures into the small and personal — solos and a duet by artists who both choreographed and performed their works — dominated the first half. Former competitive ballroom dancers Alex Tecza and Katja Lindholm eschewed glitter in their wonderfully soft, easeful duet "Stay," creating a unique vision of partner dancing despite Rihanna's threadbare tune and a few cliched gestures.

Solos by the only two out-of-towners delivered long, hard looks at who they are. In "Inscribed here, the archive," a visually stunning excerpt from another piece, Maria Gillespie of Milwaukee's Oni Dance seems to mourn a lost loved one, movingly pictured in home-movie video. Onstage camera setups create Gillespie's "partners": herself in huge, crisp shadows and live and recorded projections. Though almost overfilled with ideas, "Inscribed" does reveal a grieving, malleable person in a powerfully realized environment.

Detroit's Marcus White makes himself even more vulnerable in "Pearls." A strong man of ambiguous sexuality, White ingeniously interacts with himself — especially his hands, wildly chattering into his face — and with heaps of rustling, glowing necklaces.

The second half's ensemble works — the best of them witty, playful, maybe satirical, with fresh, ingenious scores — essentially created their own little societies.

Deft touches define "Stories in Gibberish," a quartet choreographed by Jacqueline Stewart of Jaxon Movement Arts. But perhaps the cleverest is the sound track, which includes part of a Louis C.K. routine: Instantly, we're both laughing and immersed in the pitiful overheard conversations of contemporary life. Later, nuanced music shifts the mood and provides a context for some challenging partnering, which the dancers aced.

Fretful, seemingly involuntary oddities carry Netta Yerushalmy's "The Force Backwards," created for Same Planet Different World last fall, into delectable cartoon territory. More important, this quartet fully succeeds on dance terms, in its invention, musicality and snowballing momentum, concluding in a satisfying photo finish.

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**When:** 8 p.m. Saturday, 3 p.m. Sunday

**Where:** Ruth Page Center for the Arts, 1012 N. Dearborn St.

**Tickets:** \$18-\$25 at 312-337-6543 or [hccdf.com](http://hccdf.com)

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