



PEARSONWIDRIG Dance is Clever, Fun

By Tresca Weinstein

PS21 in Chatham can now count itself among the hundreds of venues on three continents that have hosted PearsonWidrig DanceTheater's "Ordinary Festivals." It's the kind of dance the world needs more of: joyful, clever and unabashedly fun. Set to Italian folk music, with the women in polka dot dresses, the men in vests and 300 oranges as props, "Ordinary Festivals," from 1995, is a tongue-in-cheek romp that balances high spirits with precision dancing. A trio repeated by several groups involves lightning-fast exchanges of oranges within inter-linked arms; there's a lot of perfectly timed throwing and catching (and occasionally missing) of oranges as well. In one section, the dancers treat a rug spread out on the stage as if it was a trampoline, jumping on it, tumbling in somersaults across it and falling on it — hard.

In another vignette, the dancers toss oranges at Sara Pearson and Patrik Widrig (the troupe's founders) as they compete to see which one can catch the most fruit on the tip of a knife.

Pearson and Widrig, who are based at the University of Maryland, have also made dances with ice, hay and sprinklers. But happily, their work doesn't depend on props: "Ordinary Festivals" may be their big hit, but the company can strike more than one note.

Case in point: 2010's "Oahishu," also on Friday's program. The piece has a minimalist and a measured pace. The score by James Nyoraku Schlefer, a leading performer of shakuhachi (a Japanese flute), enhances the calligraphic quality of the movement, with bodies painting lines, curves and intersecting patterns in space and on the floor. Pearson's choreography has a raw, unpolished quality — it's beautiful, but not pretty.

That vigor and authenticity is even more apparent in the work-in-progress "A Season of No Regrets," accompanied live by composer and violinist David Schulman. Individually and as a group, the five dancers (Graham Brown, Stephanie Miracle, Bethany Disque, Connor Voss and Widrig) fling themselves through the air, landing extended on the floor, caught in each other's arms or, once, hanging partway off the stage. They hold nothing back, taking us along for the ride, breathless.