

DANCE

Review: For DanceNow's 20th Anniversary, an Encore at Joe's Pub

By **BRIAN SEIBERT** SEPT. 28, 2015

At Joe's Pub on Thursday, a woman at one table was salting her food heavily. In a thick New York accent, she complained about her husband. She tossed salt over her shoulder in great arcs, but no one was hit because she had a tiny bit more space around her than everyone else. She was onstage.

For many years now, this stage, not large enough to accommodate more than a few diners, has been home to the DanceNow festival. At earlier points in its two-decade history, the festival has inhabited much larger spaces and many more of them, but considering the difficulties of presenting dance in New York, mere survival is remarkable. From Sept. 9 to 12, four 20th-anniversary programs showcased the work of about 50 artists. Thursday's performance was an encore, with a baker's dozen of acts chosen by the producers.

The woman with the salt was Sara Pearson, performing an excerpt from her theatrically savvy 2001 work "The Return of Lot's Wife." In looking back to a piece from the past, she was in the minority, though it was the few older works that best met the festival's twin challenges of space and time: No piece may exceed five minutes.

Amid many soloists with nearly stationary feet, Jonathan Emanuell Alsberry stood out by leaving the ground. In works by Aszure Barton from 2001 and 2009,

the big jumps of his hyper-supple body made the tight boundaries briefly disappear. Brian Brooks, in his 2007 solo "I'm Going to Explode," was the most disciplined in structure, methodically releasing his corporal explosion throughout the allotted duration.

Some new works had brilliant moments: the moment when Deborah Lohse in "That One Night in 1995," an otherwise awkwardly unfunny duet with Mark Gindick, imagined the remainder of her character's life in a five-second fast forward; the moments in Megan Williams's "Happy Anniversary Dance" when she caught the madcap gusts of Carl Stalling music for cartoons.

"Lana Del Rey's 37 Reasons," by the feath3r theory, was the most intriguing selection. Defying the strict confines of time and space, Raja Feather Kelly had a cast of nine mill about with sullen aimlessness and argue to the noirish melodrama of Ms. Del Rey's music. There was something fresh about the approach, which can't be said for Jane Comfort's "Clown Car" and its five performers lip-synching to the speeches of Republican presidential candidates while behaving in a manner those candidates would likely condemn. The DanceNow challenge demands accuracy, but do the targets have to be so easy?