

The Las Vegas Weekly
Jul. 27 - Aug. 2

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DANCE: Dance in the Desert Festival

By Geri Jeter

Dance in the Desert Festival CCSN, July 21-22

Photo by Iris Dumuk

Last weekend, the Community College of Southern Nevada presented the 8th annual Dance in the Desert Festival. Directed by Kelly Roth, it consisted of three mixed repertory concerts with minimal repetition. At each were film and video works celebrating the life and work of the festival honoree, Murray Louis, a man who transformed dance through his brilliant performances and innovative choreography. Like most dance festivals, it was a mixed bag of styles, disciplines, and quality.

On both evenings, the Nannette Brodie Dance Theatre presented an excerpt from Tango Point. Kelly Roth's deconstructed tango was danced by the fluid and technically proficient Stephanie Chadwick and Javier Gonzalez, whose seductively intertwined bodies sizzled with sexual tension. On Saturday, the same company's production of Andrew Vaca's Going Forward ... More Dances About Cities and People was a real crowd-pleaser with its Talking Heads music and '80s-infused urban-chic sensibility.

Other highlights included strong performances by San Diego's Butterworth Dance Company, whose Pulse, although a bit static in its movement, showcased some novel partner work; Anandha Ray's Beyond the Picket Fence for Moving Arts Dance was a fluid and graceful study in duo choreography, recognizing that how dancers come down from a lift is just as important as how they go up; and "Rapid Eye Movement," an excerpt from Kelly Roth & Dancers' Lehi's Dream 2006, featured a bright and charming Masami Kadota, who captivated the audience with her sheer joy of dancing.

The pacing was different each evening. Friday was more anguished, introspective and self-conscious, and mostly choreographed to trance-inducing scores, whereas the more successful Saturday program achieved a balance between angst and dance-as-joy. Saturday also featured some humor, including Concert Dance Company's *Hernaesus & Taphea*, a loving send-up of dance conventions. Plagued by a leering satyr, women in Greek robes carried plastic water jugs (in place of Grecian urns) to ponds constructed of wading pools. Because the performers trusted the tight choreography and didn't ham it up, the laughs came in the right places.

The festival closed with its most ambitious work, *Groves*, by CCSN's Concert Dance Company. A large ensemble work by Kelly Roth to a percussive score by William Kraft, this homage to the Louis/Nikolais tradition challenged the dancers to work within the lyrical abstract framework as a cohesive unit. They succeeded.

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