

## 'Boxed Set': Tight Space, Taut Performance

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The "In" Series closed its 11th annual "Women's Work, Woman's Words" series with "Boxed Set," a dance concert in which artistic resourcefulness took center stage.

The series had been held at Mount Vernon College for 18 years, but last year George Washington University, which had taken over Mount Vernon, said it would no longer provide space for the performances. The Czech Embassy came to the rescue with a venue for this weekend's offerings.

But the embassy has no real stage, though platforms were fitted together to provide a very small raised area the dancers had to share with a baby grand piano.

Choreographers Laura Schandelmeier and Kristin O'Shee overcame the limitations. Schandelmeier, who created five of the program's seven works, performed her four solos on a white box. She explored a range of moods, from humor to angst, and, yes, range of movement. In the opening excerpt from "Mademoiselle," a mocking commentary on the feminine preoccupation with beauty, Schandelmeier managed, in fact, to move every part of her body without displacing herself more than a few inches. Balancing on one foot, jammed into an outrageous high-heeled platform shoe, she seemed physically capable of almost anything. In later pieces, she turned the box over and maneuvered on its rim, like a tight-rope walker; then, with the box back in position, she clung, upside down, to the side with her legs in a split.

In the Owl excerpt from her "Animal Prayer," O'Shee gestured around her head in silence to re-create the creature's mystique. A passage from her "Grand: Movement for Piano, Pianist" focused on her interaction with composer-musician Frances McKay.

Jane Jerardi and Sandra Mendes danced Schandelmeier's superbly constructed "Duets." Despite the difficult setting, it was a jewel. With soprano Detra Battle and pianist Carla Hubner offering fine accompaniment, there was little actual ground for the dancers to cover. Still their couplings ebbed and flowed unrestrained to Verdi's glorious "D'amor sull'ali rose" from "Il Trovatore."

-- Paula Durbin

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