

The Washington Post

October 27, 2008



Dancenow Productions

By Celia Wren

Forget plastic tombstones and candy corn: For a less clichéd dose of Halloween spirit, how about choreography performed on a Ouija board?

Laura Schandelmeier and Stephen Clapp of Dancenow Productions conjure up such an entertainment in "Haunted," an intriguingly spooky movement-theater piece that twitches and skates -- like a bedeviled planchette -- across a black floor painted with numbers and letters. The hour-long work, which muses in part on the documented local incident that reportedly inspired "The Exorcist," had a three-performance run over the weekend at Joe's Movement Emporium in Mount Rainier; it will encore at midnight on Oct. 31 and at 8 p.m. on All Saints' Day (Nov. 1).

Schandelmeier and Clapp created "Haunted" in concert with R.I.S.E., a musical ensemble, and Ghanaian percussionist and storyteller Kofi Dennis, who performs onstage in the show's glowing, fog-misted light. As Dennis wields drums and rattles, supplementing R.I.S.E.'s eerie recorded soundscape -- chanting, hypnotic piano riffs, poltergeist-like squeaking and hissing -- Schandelmeier and Clapp spasm, freeze and knit themselves together in movements suggesting entrapment and spiritual frenzy. Sometimes they grab at each other, or wrestle, or entwine in supported handstands, their gold-black tunics and leggings fluttering; sometimes they reverently match palms or move their hands in sync, as if invoking a spell. Sometimes Dennis joins the physicality, whirling in mystic fervor, his white garments flaring around him.

Anchoring the colorful kinetics to history, the "Haunted" soundtrack includes an echoing recitation (read by Michael Kramer) of a 1949 Washington Post article about an exorcism that, some averred, purged a Mount Rainier boy of diabolic possession (an event mined by the novel "The Exorcist"). Less persuasive is another spoken-word section, in which Dennis cites a recent local child abuse case; this sequence seems a forced bid for topicality, interrupting "Haunted's" enjoyably spectral tone.