

# Brawn with Brains

Pilobolus approaches middle age

In 1971, a group of Dartmouth College gymnasts wandered off their tumbling mats and into a modern dance class, and a new dance-theater company was born. Pilobolus, a performance collective named for a spontaneously eruptive spore found around pastures and meadows, makes works that are collaborative in process and accessible in design. And perhaps they can credit their longevity to egghead smarts. Early on, they famously declined an invitation to travel with a smitten Frank Zappa as his band's opener, because they had to study for midterms.

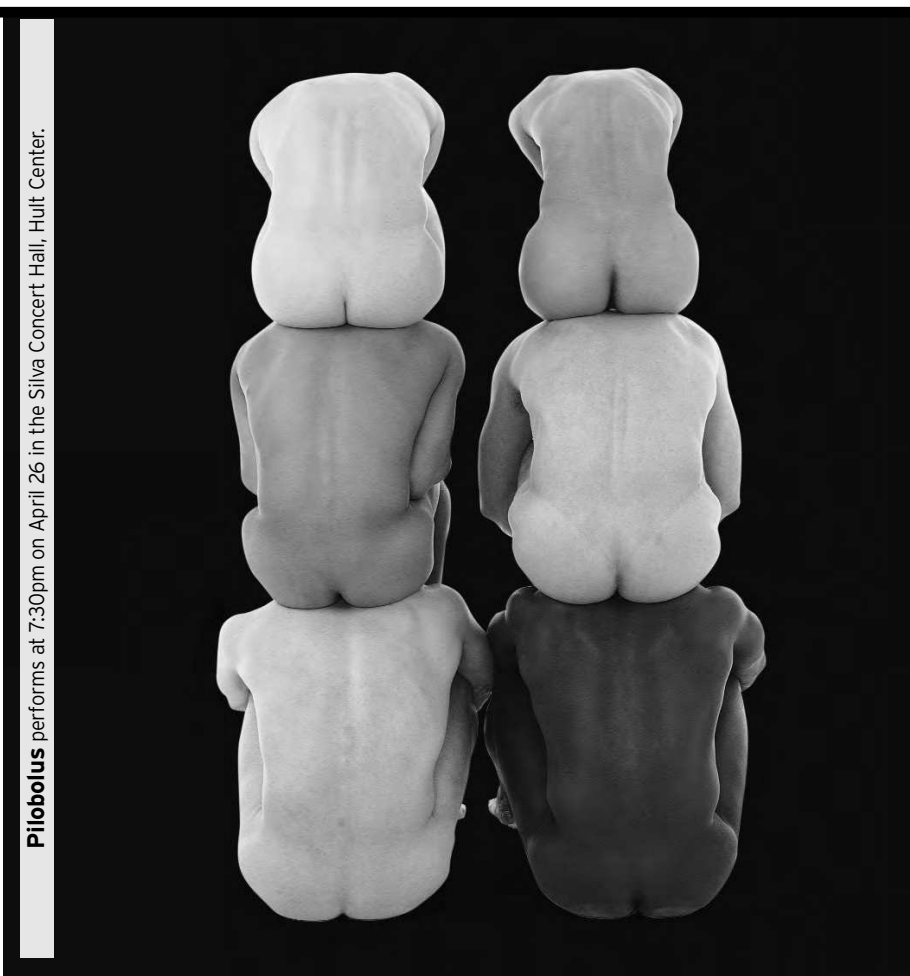
But they're not in school anymore. Four co-artistic directors Robby Barnett, Alison Chase, Michael Tracy and Jonathan Wolken supervise Pilobolus' breakneck touring schedule and the insistently egalitarian (at least in principle) creative process.

Universal language is what makes the work appealing to audiences. Pilobolus does not root itself in cultural tropes that might bog down the watching. There's a breezy, fantastical quality to the movement, whether the piece is light or dark, and an evocative moment where we get to sit back and just enjoy a rich hot fudge sundae of imagination. Let them do the experimenting, the play, the lifts, the lugs, and then present it in a package that makes it all look delightfully gooey and fun!

The varied line-up for the Eugene performance reflects some departures the artistic company has made in recent years, as well as pieces that stay true to Pilobolus's athletic, funny, "How did they do that?" roots. The evening opens with "Star-cross'd," a swift retelling of the Romeo and Juliet story, choreographed by Alison Chase. Red-dressed Mermaids twist and flip in 1972's "Pseudopodia," and "Walklyndon" (1971) is pure slapstick physical comedy, with its clever crosses and quirky relationships. "Symbiosis" explores the dynamics of love and not-love. And finally, "Brass Ring" delves into the music and imagery of movement performance throughout recent history. It touches on vaudeville to the big-top and makes a fitting end to an evening that will bring dance to a heightened, yet approachable, place.

Pilobolus has legions of worldwide fans and sells out a run in New York every year. Their challenge as one of the country's imminent and inimitable companies is to continually find the "new." Their early work is robust and beloved, the vision of frisky coeds with energy and knee cartilage to burn. Critics have complained that more recent efforts show too much play and not enough art, in other words, the company's more contemporary choreography lacks the distilled form that should coalesce from the discovery

Pilobolus performs at 7:30pm on April 26 in the Silva Concert Hall, Hult Center.



process. Pilobolus's work is still well worth a peek. If it helps develop an audience for dance, maybe play is enough.

Fans of the company, unsated by the one-night-only performance April 26, may want to look for Mirra Bank's 2003 docu-

mentary "Last Dance," which chronicles Pilobolus's work with renowned author and illustrator Maurice Sendak. The film is terrific. It portrays the incredulity, attitudes, egos, frustrations and breakthroughs inherent in making art. **EW**

## Dance Alone, Altogether

LCC presents 'The Works.'

The late Martha Graham held a fervent belief that center stage was wherever she was dancing. Graham had the star-powered élan, whether in solo or group work, to draw focus to wherever she was. When LCC presents its spring student concert "The Works" this weekend, we probably won't see any Grahams on the stage. But we will see unequivocally exuberant movers, a few promising solos and some interesting group work.

I enjoy watching student-choreographed concerts because they're inevitably accessible. They're often

**The Works: Choreography and Dance by LCC Students.**  
8 pm April 21, 22 and 23, LCC Performance Hall  
\$6 adults; \$5 students, seniors. Tickets at the door. Ticket Office: 463-5202

arranged in a *poco de todo* line-up that offers an opportunity to take in many creative perspectives. Here, most of the dancers approach "The Solo," the hardest feat to pull off. Exposing every misstep, making plain each dropped choreographic stitch and laying bare moments of over-the-top emotion and pastiche, solos are elusive, operatic, dangerous.

The choreographers I saw in rehearsal approached the challenge with gusto. Several pull together tightly bound pieces that break free of the student label. Emily Joyce's "Flutter" explores earthy realms with strong, collected jumps and lightly flicking arms. Jennifer Stone's "Frigid Scales" undulates between the tensely sensual and the floppily resigned. Mandi Barbar's jazzy "Layers" breezes along finely gestured pathways. And Lisa Spence's "Propensities" breathes with oceanic confidence. — *Rachael Carnes*

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