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## Memories of late dance icons abound

By **CAROLINE PALMER**, Special to the Star Tribune

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Curators Olive Bierenga and Otto Ramstad of the BodyCartography Project dedicated Saturday night's Choreographer's Evening performances to a trio of late, great dance icons -- Pina Bausch, Merce Cunningham and Michael Jackson -- and reminders of their legacies, intended or not, were apparent throughout the show at Walker Art Center.

Bauschian influences could be found in Taja Will's emotionally raw "(not) My Blood" and Penelope Freeh's Black Friday-inspired consumerist ode "Pilgrim" (complete with red high heels -- Bausch would approve). And Mad King Thomas' demolition derby using their bear-suited bodies (set to Judy Garland, why not?) showed a touch of Bausch's talent for portraying women on the verge.

Justin Jones summoned Cunningham's techno-experimental impulses with his wired solo "ElegyElegy," and Cara Ann Krippner's minimalist "Flotte" recalled the modern dance pioneer's occasionally tedious side. Chris Yon's "Flashback: The Very Unlikelihood (I'm Going to KILL You!)," a duet with Taryn Griggs, provided an example of Yon's genius for understated intricacy, referencing Merce's subtle playfulness (and John Cage's ambient soundscapes).

And Jackson? His sequined spirit flowed through the sly, seemingly effortless showmanship of the Ausland brothers from Buckets and Tap Shoes, the dazzling hip-hop and break-dance moves brought by Tina Flewellyn and Hype, and even Interact Theater Company's sassy Vegas-style tribute to Tony Orlando and Dawn.

Other highlights included Kenna Sarge and "Voice of Culture" filling the Hennepin Avenue lobby with vibrant African dance and drumming, Chris Holman's charming (and historically informative) slide show connecting the mythic Paul Bunyan with "Pine King" T.B. Walker; Charles Campbell's anti-sentimental collaboration exploring togetherness and disobedience with tween son Arthur, and Emily King and Ryan Underbakke's Bonnie-and-Clyde-esque physical theater duet "We are Crafty."

At the top of the program, Bierenga and Ramstad noted that 70 acts auditioned for Choreographers' Evening. They chose well, including a welcome amount of boundary-stretching work. At 37 years old, this dance sampler program has occasionally lapsed into complacency, but in recent years the curators have tried to freshen the format -- Saturday night, for example, a team of dance docents were on hand for post-show discussions in the 2021 lounge. A Ouija board would have been appropriate, too -- you know, just in case Bausch, Cunningham and Jackson wanted to weigh in.

Caroline Palmer writes regularly about dance.

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