

Dancemakers' Loveloss makes oblique reference to death: Review

Choreographer Michael Trent asks dancers to improvise performances in Loveloss



DAVID HOU

Robert Abubo, Simon Portugal, Amanda Acorn in Dancemakers' Loveloss, on until Feb. 24 in the Distillery District.

By: Michael Crabb Special to the Star, Published on Mon Feb 18 2013

loveloss

Choreography by Michael Trent. Until Feb. 24, Dancemakers, 9 Trinity St. **416-367-1800** or **www.dancemakers.org**

The wonderful thing about live performance is that every instance is unique and unrepeatable. But what happens when you conceive a performance to amplify its unpredictability? That, in part at least, is what [Toronto's Dancemakers](#) is up to with its current offering, *Loveloss*.

As Dancemakers artistic director Michael Trent explains in a program note, [loveloss](#) constitutes a departure from his regular approach. In assigning credit, Trent, as a choreographer, is always careful to acknowledge the input of his dancers, but for *Loveloss* he requires them to improvise in performance. So, in a very determined way, no two shows will be the same.

Trent also informs us that the starting point for his new 50-minute work, on view through Sunday at Dancemakers' studio theatre in its Distillery Historic District home, was the impact of his mother's "passing."

Death, except of course for those it has already consigned to oblivion, is always disconcerting and has stimulated the imaginative juices of artists for millennia. But the nonnarrative, nonliteral *Loveloss* comes at it obliquely.

The playing area is a large white rectangular floor-cloth. The audience, maximum capacity 52, sits in single rows on all sides. Two turntables are suspended at opposing corners. Above, three metallic cone-shaped funnels dispense streams of finely granulated cork, a theatrical stand-in for sand, to form heaps on the floor.

Dancemakers' five performers, three men and two women, enter one by one in everyday clothes that are shed, to varying degrees, as the work progresses. The prevailing silence is punctuated by the scratchy sounds of early Caruso recordings and mournful Beethoven (activated at the turntables by the performers) and by contemporary composer/sound artist Christopher Willes' music for strings; all redolent of fading memories.

The movement varies in dynamic and amplitude; careful extensions of limbs, precarious balances, lunging, walking and occasional interactions in which dancers lean for support or lift each other.

Meanwhile, the heaps of ersatz sand are scattered, spread and patterned, either accidentally or intentionally. In the most obvious reference to death, Simon Portugal, his black toque pulled over his face, is buried by the other performers. Now in various states of undress, they subsequently lie down beside him as a rather jarringly intrusive electric fan is introduced to blow those sands of time over them too.

Although on occasion the performers eye the audience intently, the overall focus tends to be inward and, when a sense of community emerges, it is oddly cool and distant. It all ends with the dancers ripping up the floor-cloth and heaping it in a bundle in the middle of the stage.

Perhaps this was cathartic for them. Whether it will prove so for viewers will depend on their ability to associate personal emotions with the faintly suggestive imagery laid out before them.