

DANCE REVIEW

West, then East, in vibrant movement

Jacob & Nova

Choreography by Jacob Zimmer and Nova Bhattacharya
At the Dancemakers Centre for Creation
In Toronto on Thursday

REVIEWED BY PAULA CITRON

Jacob & Nova starts with the tried-and-true - but transforms it into something both visually and intellectually compelling.

Since taking over Dancemakers in 2006, artistic director Michael Trent has invited a variety of choreographers to create pieces. This time, he's turned to two very different creators: Jacob Zimmer and Nova Bhattacharya.

One of Dancemakers' own, Zimmer has been both a dramaturge and writer of program notes for the company. His piece in this show, *Story Dance Radio*, marks his debut as a choreographer.

The heart of Zimmer's piece is a parade of humanity, with five dancers (Robert Abubo, Amanda Acorn, Kate Holden, Simon Renaud and Pierre-Marc Ouellette) using horizontal movements across the stage to present characters ranging from a purposeful business type, to a furtive character clearly on the run. As the action progresses, larger



Left to right, Kate Holden, Rob Abubo, Amanda Acorn and Simon Renaud in *Red and Yellow*. DAVID HOU

ensembles cross the stage, and the patterns of movement shift from loose limb thrusts and on-the-spot circles to vibrant runs and large body swoops.

Repeated stage crossings is an oft-used device, of course. But Zimmer presents an intriguing outer frame for the piece by way of Christopher Stanton - who plays a radio DJ at his console with his back to the audience.

Stanton's disembodied voice - which has the breathy sound of late-night radio and is interwoven with percussion-driven pop, includes musings on love and personal freedom.

By pairing the action on stage with the DJ's musings and the lyrics of various songs, Zimmer seems to translate imagination into movement.

Where Zimmer focuses on role

play, Bhattacharya riffs on the counterpoint between the individual and the group.

Although trained in bharatanatyam, the classical dance of South India, Bhattacharya has produced a body of work that merges that ancient dance form with contemporary dance. And her piece in this show, *Red and Yellow*, is typical of her fusion style.

The piece begins with colour,

with each dancer throwing scented red and yellow powder into the air. The powders fall into beautiful patterns on the floor and their perfumed aroma fills the theatre throughout the dance.

But more than just their scent, the colours have an important meaning: They evoke passion in a piece that is about both expression and constraint.

Each of the five dancers in the piece is caught up in the throes of what seems to be some inner monologue expressing itself through compulsive movement. This is complemented by a restless urgency to the soundtrack, a mix of Southeast Asian tradition and electronica composed by Ian de Souza and Santosh Naidu.

But Bhattacharya also uses bharatanatyam mudras (finger positionings) to convey ritual. So while there's a sense of sensuality, there's also a formal aspect to the movement as well. And when the dancers do come together, it's not with ease or peace - their agitated body shudders and staccato limb thrusts speak of disquiet.

The one and the many, yes, but with an intriguing ending. Or, perhaps, a beginning.

Jacob & Nova continues until Dec. 18.