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TUESDAY, FEB. 18, 2014

Milwaukee Ballet's Triumphant Winter Series

Young and veteran dancers bring viewers close to the act of creation

By [John Schneider \(by-author-164-1.html\)](#)



Like a proud father, Michael Pink opened his company's Winter Series with an unannounced curtain raiser. MBII, Milwaukee Ballet's 20 young professionals-in-training, performed *At World's End*, a work they triumphantly premiered last month at the South Milwaukee Performing Arts Center. Made for them by resident choreographer Timothy O'Donnell who had another world premiere in this night's program, it's composed of quick, muscular scenes that highlight each dancer. The finale has them all on stage accomplishing difficult movements to an Olafur Arnalds electronic score about ultimate loss. The dancers looked a little stunned at first, but grew in confidence. The audience cheered.

How exciting then to watch the grownup artists Luz San Miguel, Marc Petrocci, Courtney Kramer, Alexandre Ferreira, Annia Hidalgo and Mengjun Chen dance the first performance of choreographer Luca Veggetti's *Scene/Six*, a work of great substance and originality carefully set to the magisterial "Vent Nocturne" for viola and electronics by Kaija Saariaho. Inspired by the painter Kandinsky's writings on composition and the subconscious, Veggetti's abstract dance balanced movement and stillness, isolation and connection to bring viewers close to the act of creation. Anything could happen next, yet each choice seemed both organic and surprising. For Kandinsky, composition was a spiritual practice.

Choreographer Gabrielle Lamb's equally original *HappenStance* shared a similar concern: How does art happen? Lamb allows for luck. The opening image is of two women surrealistically interlocked like puzzle pieces on the floor. One's extended foot is held by

one of the ensemble. He lets it drop and a culture evolves, simultaneously strange and familiar. Dancer-collaborators Kara Bruzina, Susan Gartell, Rachel Malehorn, Mayara Pineiro, Nicole Teague, Parker Brasser-Vos, Justin Genna, Davit Hovhannisyan, Ryan Martin and Isaac Sharratt formed relationships emblematic, I think, of the need for love, attention or control. In a deeply affecting passage, the men swirled, curled and collided at high speed to a slow rendition of "My Favorite Things" by the female jazz vocalist Youn Sun Nah.

At 20-something, Tim O'Donnell represents his generation nobly. An earlier ballet of his for this company questioned the moral authority of a church that would exclude homosexuals. This newest work, *Talk to Me*, asks if we're losing our ability to communicate verbally because of the technology we use. Although he hasn't yet embodied his ideas fully in the choreography, O'Donnell's questing mind was everywhere apparent. Rachel Malehorn anchored the dance with her bravura verbal and physical performance.

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