

Dance

# AU Grads, Stepping Out

By Nora FitzGerald  
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Unexpected poignancy and arresting performances redeemed an uneven program by recent American University dance graduates Saturday night at Dance Place.

The first piece, "News From the Road," choreographed by Karla Coghill, could have been called "Postcards From the Edge of Banality." Typical sentiments like "wish you were here" and "It's calm, cool and quiet" were accompanied by a jocular dance performed without much fluidity. The saving grace here was dancer Alice Howes, whose comic skills offered a respite from the rest of the work.

But Howes's work, called "Dispersion," was also problematic. While she provided some interesting visual patterns and nice dancing in the abstract piece, it reeked of the cerebral decision-making of college dance—the climax was performers walking in slow motion and falling to the ground one by one. The overall effect was more tentative than bold.

However a collaboration between Howes and Coghill called "Relief, Relax, Let Go" was quite funny and tightly constructed. The two artists engaged in a humorous rapport as they danced a manic, peripatetic work in business attire to the accompaniment of a relaxation tape that described self-nurturing techniques.

The work-in-progress "Lattice" was a vulnerable, affecting solo by J.M. Rebudal. Austere and dimly lit, the piece weaves together images and gestures that suggest the complexity of Asian American life. It was, though, somewhat overpowered by the heavy-handed music of John Phillip Sousa and Kodo Drummers of Japan.

AU professor Ann Halligan Donahue contributed two intriguing works. The first, "Woman Interrupted," featured four women dancing with an edgy, obsessive-compulsive melancholy. It ended with the women trying to unite but finding themselves compelled to continue their dark journeys alone. The second, "An Mhaighdean Mhara," offered up a riveting performance by Kristi Milner as she acted out a traditional Irish folk tale. Milner danced lovingly with a scarf that alternately represented her grave, the sea, the wind and a veil.

Milner's work in the program. "Why Does Everybody Always Have to Say Something?," was a quirky but tender look at the deluge of talking heads and opinions and the resulting apathy. The final piece, Howes's "Diner," danced to the music of Ani DiFranco, offered a larger glimpse of her arresting stage presence. The choreography here was expansive and just plain fun.

CityDance Ensemble offered a guest appearance that displayed the new company's raw, edgy talent. "Jinari," the Japanese term for earthquake, was also performed to the Kodo Drummers' accompaniment. The kinetic, turbocharged work was surely the tightest, slickest piece on the program, but it seemed at odds with the earthier personal style of the AU grads.