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News

Adf Blogs: Dance festival offers online video overview

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Photo Courtesy of American Dance Festival

The Mark Morris Dance Group is performing at the festival.

By Ken Keuffel | Journal Reporter

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The American Dance Festival no longer confines itself to real-world venues in Durham. It has also established a virtual presence in cyberspace -- thanks to a new video blog called "May we have this Cyber-Dance?"

There is a link to "CyberDance" at the festival's Web site (www.americandancefestival.org). The video blog is a collaboration between the festival and one of its choreographers, Mark Dendy, who has created two works for the festival's students and members of Durham area's dance community.

The blog, for which a three-person team is responsible in addition to several ADF administrators, aims to capture the festival's many diverse elements. These include performances (both in traditional venues and outside of them), rehearsals, classes, interviews and audience reactions.

On occasion, too, viewers of videographer Cara Clark's finely made work get a sense of Durham's atmosphere during the festival, which began June 11 and will conclude July 25.

"We wanted everyone to be able to witness what goes into creating this 76-year-old festival," David Byrd, the festival's director of marketing and communications, wrote in an e-mail. "The blog enables anyone an insider's look at the Festival's goings on. We hope that people will become even more interested and invested in the ADF and share our work with their neighbors, family, and friends."

Byrd is right. Aside from the few avid dance fans living or staying in Durham, very few people will have the time, energy and money to take in the festival each day. And even when you can visit the festival, it's not always possible to see everything that's happening on a given day.

I think "CyberDance" is a fabulous idea for several other reasons:

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Part of my beat involves reporting on modern dance. So I know firsthand how difficult this largely abstract art form can be to describe in precise, vivid and meaningful language.

It's even harder to give the reader a sense of a work if you can't see a rehearsal or taped performance of it ahead of time.

It is for these reasons that the performance and rehearsal footage in "CyberDance" is so invaluable. Dendy takes care to give us just enough footage to whet our appetites.

Each segment I saw was between one and two minutes long. Technology shouldn't make a live performance seem redundant.

There are lots of ways to become better educated about dance. These are also in evidence during many of the daily postings of "CyberDance," from interviews with Charles Reinhart, the festival's director, to audience reactions to the world-premiere performance of all three parts of Shen Wei's *Re*.

Some of the coolest (or strangest) developments at ADF are happening in "site-specific" settings, which this year means on top of a graffiti-covered wall or at a bus-stop shelter.

"CyberDance" is also to be commended for its ease of use. Everything is categorized in a highly organized fashion, and none of the pages ever comes to seem too cluttered.

Byrd was unable to provide exact costs for "CyberDance," but he acknowledged expenses for expert labor and technology. It also takes some time and planning to pull off a good video-blog segment.

But as the results of "CyberDance" show, the likely modest investment is worth it.

Other arts festivals and organizations would do well to follow ADF into the world of video blogs -- if only to keep themselves connected to the greater artistic community, wherever it may be.

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