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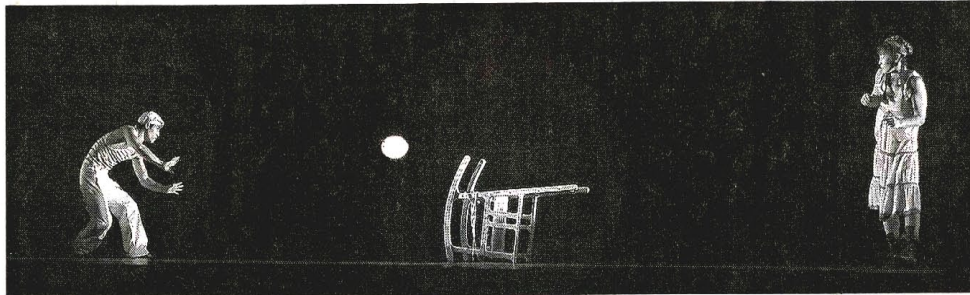
Pilobolus scores, blending the new with tried and true

By Roy C. Dicks
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DURHAM - Pilobolus has been an annual visitor at the American Dance Festival for nearly four decades because it is a crowd-pleaser. Its unique combination of athleticism, humor and imagination continues to amaze and entertain through range-expanding new works and ever-fresh classics, as confirmed in this year's programming.

Recent collaborations have taken the company on new paths, one of which is shadow play. After pieces with puppeteer Basil Twist and animated series writer Steven Banks, the company's latest comes from Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Art Spiegelman in "Hapless Hooligan in 'Still Moving,'" premiered last week at Dartmouth College, the company's birthplace.

"Hapless," based on a comic



Jun Kuribayashi and Eriko Jimbo perform at the world premiere of 'Contradance.' It's a whimsical tale of a shy guy who lives under a rocking chair, but eventually comes out of his shell when a girl takes a shine to him.

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strip from early last century, follows the naïve title character from birth to discovering the opposite sex to fighting for his beloved's affections. Color cartoon panels of offices, homes and outdoor settings are projected on a screen where dancers' shadows enact the story. The collaborators have great fun playing with

perspective and illusion, enhanced by animated sequences in which flowers grow, lightning strikes and bricks fall.

Those who know Spiegelman's work ("Maus" and his New Yorker covers) will recognize the darker elements of the noir-movie violence and the graveyard sequence. But

typical Pilobolus humor and dream-world touches also abound, keeping this category-defying piece lively and constantly surprising.

'Contradance' premiere

Another collaboration, this time with Grammy winner Dan Zanes, is premiering on

this program. "Contradance" takes its cues from Zanes' family-friendly songs in a whimsical tale of a shy guy who lives under a rocking chair, at first taunted and bullied by others but eventually brought out of his shell by a girl who takes a shine to him.

There's a lot of quirky playfulness in this living children's

book, sometimes too cute and diffuse but often filled with charming images, from dancers imitating insects with kazoes to the sweethearts atop the rocking chair, as if on a boat, with dancers as rolling waves below.

Although it's intriguing to see Pilobolus stretch, it's also gratifying to be taken over once again by its signature works. "Walklyndon" still gets laughs with its slapstick, split-second timing, "Gnomes" still astounds with its mystical beauty and feats of balance, and "Megawatt" still astonishes with its unrelentingly energetic spasms, spins and body slams.

Sadly, the program is also a tribute to Jonathan Wolken, the recently deceased co-founder and co-artistic director, as seen in these classic pieces and in a moving video tribute before the show.

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