

Dances for a Small Stage mixes it up like a box of chocolates for Valentine's

by [Janet Smith](#) on February 13th, 2016 at 2:54 PM

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- Where else might all these artists ever share a stage--let alone one this small?Derek Stevens

A Movent presentation. At the ANZA Club on Friday, February 12. Continues to February 14
Edgy contemporary dance, red-hot flamenco, off-the-hook hip-hop, and impromptu bhangra lessons: not bad for a winter's evening out.

Such was the beyond-eclectic mix at the Valentine's installment of Dances for a Small Stage, and fittingly, there was a lot to love on the jam-packed program of short works.

The series has found its best home yet at the atmospheric ANZA Club, where the cozy, cabaret-style room, good sightlines, and, of course, well-stocked corner bar give the show more intimacy and ambiance than it's had at bigger halls over the years.

Hosts Symone (divine drag star about town, "face by MAC, body by B.C. Lions," as she quips) and Burgundy Brix (a scarlet-haired regular on the city's booming burlesque scene) add the requisite gentle raciness and warmth to the proceedings. As usual, they set a casual tone diametrically opposed

to the usual serious contemporary-dance setting—which is, of course, the whole point of Small Stage.

Each of the diverse works on this roster is supposed to be about love, but, mercifully, there is not a mushy, literal number in the lot.

Standouts include short pieces from some acclaimed names. Lesley Telford, back in Vancouver (after stints at Les Grands Ballet Canadiens, Compañía Nacional de Danza, and Nederlands Dans Theater), is an exciting voice on the scene who's crafted work for Ballet BC and Arts Umbrella. I love the way her detailed *My tongue, your ear* seems to deliriously defy time and space, with bodies leaning and spinning off their centre of gravity or moving backward like some higher being is reversing the clock. Here, she creates a dreamlike duet for former Ballet BC bright light Darren Devaney and Maya Tenzer, set to Nico Muhly's haunting, pulsing *Etude 1A*, featuring angular viola, and the disjointed excerpts of Polish poet Wslawa Szymborska's ironic portrayal of parting, "The Tower of Babel".

Another crowd-pleaser is Joshua Beamish's hilarious solo *Concerto Casanova*, in which the accomplished dance artist appears half-naked in tight khakis, somehow managing to blend the turns and tippytoes of classical ballet (set to delicate baroque music) with the sexy posturing of male models—or maybe strippers. It's coy, technically sharp (as it has to be), and full of swagger. It's also a pretty funny parody of ballet.

Equally entertaining is charismatic local dancer Walter Kubanek's solo, ironically titled *Another White Heterosexual Duet*. Choreographer Jennifer McLeish-Lewis's amusing ruse finds him starting a conversation by asking an invisible partner about herself, only to spiral into a manic outpouring of his own issues and dreams. It's bookended by two dance segments, one wonky and falling-over spazzy, the other confident, spinning, flying.

Among the bright new talents, Naomi Brand debuts a cool solo for herself called *Lub Dub*, with its pulsing red lights creating a simple but visually arresting vision of beating hearts set to a robotic female voice; it's a taut and striking little number. And Hannah Henney's intermittent hip-hop numbers, with their empowered fly girls and Andrew Creightney's B-boy/"businessman", pump up the show's energy.

It's a treat to see local flamenco star Karen Pitkethly push beyond the Spanish form's ruffles and traditional roots into contemporary territory for *Romeo + Juliet*, and Diskordanse truly defies the stage size with the explosive physical energy of its five dancers.

Finally, it's impossible to describe the thrill in watching bhangra performer Hardeep Singh Sahota rock the joint out for the closing number in his Valentine-red costume. His beat-pumping medley is like the icing on the cake—or the salted-caramel whipped cream on the dessert that Small Stage serves at intermission.

The show continues tonight and Sunday afternoon, and hey: it's got way more variety than that box of chocolates you were thinking of getting.