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Blog Stage – July 2008

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New Works from Seasoned Choreographers



Every performance I reviewed this month featured a brand-new work by an established choreographer. American Ballet Theatre premiered a highly anticipated ballet by Twyla Tharp. Celebrating its 18th-anniversary season, the Erica Essner Performance Co-Op offered a new Essner ensemble piece. The Fly-by-Night Dance Theater presented *The Amelia Project: Phase II*, a new aerial dance by master trapeze choreographer Julie Ludwick. And Nicholas Leichter Dance premiered "Spanish Wells," Leichter's Caribbean-flavored group work set to a strange combination of Debussy's symphonic music and Amy Winehouse's blues.

Fly-by-Night Dance Theater

Aerial dance choreographer Julie Ludwick should be enjoying greater notoriety than she currently garners in the contemporary dance world. The history books will surely recognize her as an exceptional artist who has taken modern dance to new places (literally) and mined its expressive potential in a truly original fashion. As the artistic director of Fly-by-Night Dance Theater, Ludwick has developed a movement language that extends the spatial and kinetic possibilities of modern dance by blending it with low-flying trapeze work, yet with no evocation of circus-trick sensibilities.

Inspired by the fearlessness of aviator Amelia Earhart, Ludwick devised *The Amelia Project: Phase II*, a clever dance play celebrating the wonder of flight, which she and her five-member company performed at the Flea Theater June 19–22. Complete with crash landings, a competitive air show, a first flying lesson, and daring solo flights—one performed blindfolded—the production persuasively conveys the exhilaration as well as the perils of aviation.

The execution of the choreography within the confines of the wee Flea made for an unusually visceral experience. As a dancer hung from her knees on a wide-circling trapeze, she'd pass right across the faces of the front row of audience members, then barely miss the side walls of the intimate space, practically skim her chin along the floor, and finally fly just inches above the bodies of other dancers darting, with split-second timing, across the stage beneath her. The proximity of the risky actions—performed with comforting authority by Ludwick's courageous dancers—lent an added charge to what is already an intensely dramatic work.

See full review (with other companies): <http://backstage.com/blogstage/2008/07/new-works-from.html>