

All That Jazz

-- A Comparative Review of Hubbard Street
Dance and Dancin' Man



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All That Jazz – A Dance Review

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In this review, I compare and contrast two dance works from a live performance to a video piece of professional jazz dance. The former one is “*Counter / Part*”, from Hubbard Street Dance concert, Civic Center, Madison, Oct. 11, 2002. The latter one is the second piece from the videotape: “*Dancin’ Man; Jeff Hyslop and Ann Reinking*”, which I borrowed from the resource center of our Dance Department. I first present the detailed information about each piece respectively.

Title: Counter / Part

Dancers: Shannon Alvis, Cheryl Mann, Yael Levitin Saban, Lauri Stallings, Brian Enos, Jamy Meek, Geoff Myers, Massimo Pacilli, Patrick Simoniello, Christopher Tierney

Choreographers: Jim Vincent

Music / Instrumentation: “Allegro” from “Concerto No. 3 in G major, BWV1048” by Johann Sebastian Bach . “Italian Concerto, BWV 971” by Johann Sebastian Bach. “Adagio” from “Concerto No. 3 in G major, BWV1048” by Johann Sebastian Bach . “Prekyde ub E nubir” from “Eight Little Preludes & Fugues, BWV 555” by Johann Sebastian Bach. “Allegro” from “Concerto No. 1 in F major, BWV1046” by Johann Sebastian Bach.

Costumes: Renaissance black dress, red underwear like skirt.

Length of time: 27 minutes

- Title:** The second piece of Dancin' Man
- Dancers:** Two groups, each consists of one male dancer and 4 female dancers
- Choreographers:** Bob Fosse
- Music /** Street Jazz type of music, with lots of percussion.
- Instrumentation:**
- Scenery:** A deserted construction sites at night, with stairs, iron fence, and poles
- Costumes:** Yellow tight sleeveless top, black short tight; leather black tight suit; White shirt, leather tight.
- Length of time:** 6 munites

Unfortunately, for the second piece, there is no index of titles, casting or music information available from the tape. From my search from the Internet, I could only identify that it was from the choreography of Bob Fosse. In this paper, I refer to it simply as "Dancin' Man". Following, I shall proceed to analyze those two pieces from thematic material, spatial design, movement style and musical analysis. Finally I complete the review by some general comments to the HSD live performance.

Thematic material. Divided into two "counters" and four "parts", totaled six contrasting sections, Vincent's "Counter/part" fuses allegory with raw sexuality. Its coyly deconstructed Renaissance costumes by Mara Blumenfeld suggest images from Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew". During the work, the mood alternates between buoyant energy and wrenching lyricism.

If “Counter/Part” is of abstract style, then “Dancin’ Man” is of realism. Consists of four parts: a solo, a five people dance centered by the male dancer, a duet of two male dancers’ fighting dance, and a group dance of all the ten dancers, this work tries to portrait a picture of a friendly street fighting. The sexy and flamboyant customs and street jazz style music are carefully chosen to serve this theme perfectly, with the music edited in such a way to connect different parts together.

Spatial design. “Counter / Part” took place on the stage. One interesting part about it is the black background curtain, which can be moved partially up and down, and left and right. Together with the light design, it creates different depth of spaces and focus in different sections, and scroll patterns occasionally illuminate the floor. Yet its rotating structure, which continually turns in on itself, creates a self-conscious disjointedness. In one section, a woman dances with five men in varying pairs and a trio, while in another section six dancers group by couples. At the last scene, when other dancers are grouped together, there is a man that danced by himself to a different theme.

As a contrast, “Dancin’ Man” was presented on set, with the help of camera, it provides additional flexibility that hard to find in a stage setting. For example, the background was a deserted construction sites at night, with stairs, iron fence, and poles, which divided the space into different heights. To create the realistic atmosphere, the dancers even entered the camera sight with motorcycles. Unlike a live concert, the camera leads the eyes of the audience, which can create some dramatic effects. In the “conflict of two groups” section, the presence of the second group was introduced by a sharp switch from the first one, which emphasizes the contrast between the two. In the first section, the man give a

solo, then those women join him one after another, finalized by a group dance. The second section begins by a duet that depicts the showoff and fighting between the two males of the two groups. They switch from the higher space to the lower space, and again switch back. This not only makes the scene interesting but also makes the fighting more real. Section two proceeds to a group dance of all dancers pair-wise fighting. I like the clean ending: the police car siren scares away the people with the two jumping to and frozen on the fence.

Movement style. Vincent's fencing, roughhousing and slouched movements, as well as a ragdoll-like reversal of the balletic line, make for intriguing psychological stage pictures. They also leave one searching for a solid choreographic viewpoint. The dancers, while adept throughout the evening and capable of tackling the most daunting choreographic challenge, prove their fluidity with an entirely new style of moving. Of particular intensity and fascination is Lauri Stallings as a woman stripped down to her primal essence and the man as a red-skirted dirge-like figure of lust (or devil?). Vincent combines mock courtier gestures with vivid variations on the pastoral-folkloric ensemble staple. He also incorporates a sensual nude segment behind a gauze curtain and Massimo Pacilli's breathy narration of Italian phrases. But, for most of this 27-minute work, these avant-garde touches feel contrived and strung together for the sake of looking arty. This piece has moments of ethereal beauty and compelling ideas.

Although "Dancin' Man" is to depict fighting, the movements of the males are basically lyrical, featured by lots of ballet leaps as well as gymnastic flips. Those turns (three turns at the air) are impressive. The dancers angle their hips slightly forward. They hang their

arms loosely at their sides and snap their fingers, with pigeon-toed walks, dropped shoulders with extended arms; the pelvis thrust forward; and knees that knock. As a contrast, the group dance is rather percussive, with twitching shoulders and wagging fingers.

Musical analysis. “Counter/part” is set to Bach's Brandenburg concertos and Italian Concerto in F Major for Harpsichord. It is a constellation apart: a genuine theatrical reflection of the music, punctuated by a courtly signature (two fingers carving the air above the head) and reverent atmospherics. The movements virtualized the music.

On the opposite, as mentioned before, the music in “Dancin’ Man” is minimal to the choreography. –The choreographer had the theme first, then the music was chosen and edited in such a way to support it. Lots of percussion is used, which matches the atmosphere of this piece well. If we say the music is the soul of “Counter/part” piece, then in the “Dancin’ Man” piece, the movements add meanings to the music.

Summary. To complete this review, I would like to add a few general comments to the live performance. Hubbard Street (named after its humble first premises in Windy City) works with a cocktail of ballet and contemporary styles, yet the jazz-dance attitude prevails. By the end of the generous two hours performance of HSD, you begin to see another characteristic emerge. Hubbard Street is not about individuals. It's a team, a pooling of talent into a collective ego. And that's both a strength and a liability.