

# Nervous energy

New York's Nerve snaps synapses at the Marquee

BY GREG MCFARLANE

"Stomach acid jazz."

That's what Nerve drummer Jojo Mayer calls his band's brand of music. And while the crowd at the Marquee would no doubt agree with the label, they had a different adjective — slammin'.

They used that word because the New York-based band, backed by possibly the best live drumming I've ever witnessed, took beats, keys and sometimes-slick basslines from inside instruments to the insides of an enthralled audience.

Hiphop and underground beats have never been as popular as they are right now. Just look at the sudden mainstream success of electronica artists — and urban artists like The Roots, who use live drumming and jazz influences as

the foundation for bravado-laced rap. While Nerve doesn't have anyone laying lines on top of their work, they could, and it would be as critically acclaimed.

Audience members reacted differently to the show. Some stood or sat, their heads nodding back and forth agreeably with Mayer's frenetic beats or Tim Lefebvre's bass, glancing at friends beside them with a smile when the band impressed with another switch in tempo or Jamie Saft's keys came from nowhere to knock them back. Others danced — some in a comatose-like trance, some shaking their crazy whiteboy moves in front of the stage.

Either way, it was all cool. The band played — intense, happy, lost, but always together — and took us along for the ride.

It's too bad it had to end.



BUMP BUMP BUMP IN THE NIGHT: the Groove Collective at the Marquee.

# Local dance artists test new works-in-progress

Open Studio Series offers a sneak peek of choreographers' minds

BY JANET FRENCH

Last weekend local choreographers and performers gathered at the DANSpace on Grafton for another evening of the Open Studio Series.

The March 26 and 27 performances featured polished pieces and works-in-progress from the likes of Helen Labartkova, Gwen Noah, Veronique MacKenzie-Bourne, Charelle Thibault and Marise Vachon.

Coordinated by Dance Nova Scotia, the Open Dance Series

provides a forum for the presentation of dance works in an informal setting.

Dance Nova Scotia's Executive Director Dianne Milligan said the organization started the series because local artists felt the need to gain feedback on their evolving works.

The highlight of the evening was Veronique MacKenzie Bourne's "Rat Race", a work in progress. This number from Halifax's comedienne of dance drew parallels between the

conditioned reactions of laboratory rats and the lemmings of the busy working world. Dressed in business clothes, with mouse tails attached, the dancers scrambled about a life-size cardboard maze in a desperate search for cheese-snacks. Bubble-wrap hidden beneath a layer of newspaper on the floor simulated the surprising sound of electric shocks mice receive during psychological testing.

Choreographer and dancer Charelle Thibault presented two new choreographic works, the first

of which was an intense and vibrant tap solo entitled "Acapella". Thibault's solo piece manipulated traditional tap steps into a stunning rhythmic assault. Proud and dramatic, "Acapella" captured the interest and enthusiasm of the crowd.

Tap dancing is a sadly unrepresented art in the Halifax dance scene, and it is encouraging to see it brought back to life. Thibault's second piece, which is as yet untitled, was a group number described as "an expression of the emotional, physical and spiritual struggle of being a dancer". The piece was intended to be powerful, but it needed work. Frequently, the dancers looked disoriented, as if to say, "what step is next?"

The choreographic genius of Helen Labartkova brought character dance back to life with her works "Russian Dance" and

"Aragonian Hota." Both pieces were lively and playful, effectively combining the technical skill and grace of the dancers.

Gwen Noah, a solo artist specializing in contemporary pieces, presented an improvisational work. Noah's movements were sweeping and suspenseful, and captured the spirit of liberated motion. She let loose, pouring her soul out to the audience in an uninhibited bout of self-expression.

The Open Studio Series was exciting because it presented promising works of dance that will hopefully grow into full-fledged performance pieces. It is fascinating to get a sneak-peek at the partially-organized fragments of choreography swarming in an artist's head.

Hopefully, Halifax will be seeing more of these.

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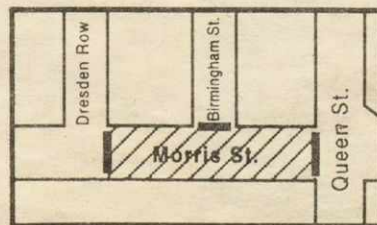
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