

# Daring innovation: Kaeja d'Dance

BY TANIA TREPANIER

Six years ago, a husband and wife team picked a name for their new dance company by rearranging letters from their family names. Since then, Kaeja d'Dance has developed an innovative technique of choreography and a signature style of dance. The company performed last week at the Sir James Dunn Theatre.

Kaeja d'Dance founders Allen Kaeja and Karen Resnick Kaeja also held a composition workshop last week at Halifax Dance. The warm-up of the workshop consisted of improvised movements led, in turn, by each dancer in a circle. The dancers then worked in smaller groups, adding movements together until they formed dance "phrases" that flowed to form the beginning of a dance piece. The Kaejas call this approach "structured innovation."

The method is structured innovation because it is an improvisation technique which gives the dancers certain emotional guidelines — such as a physicality, a colour, or a location — as well as certain movement guidelines, for instance, that movements must ricochet, or be torso-initiated, or that dancers must travel. In this way, the dancers have the freedom to interpret the guidelines laid out in their own individual way, and when they work as a team, the effects can be astounding.

This technique is not only used with students; it is also integral to the way the members of Kaeja



d'Dance create their choreographic work.

All of the pieces presented at the Dunn Theatre had a distinctly European flavour. The first piece, *Eugene Walks with Grace*, was a sinuous, sensual, playful representation of two eccentrics. The music accentuated the whimsical relationship of two people who are wise and naive at the same time.

*In Blood*, the second piece presented, represented a brilliant display of masculinity. As the title suggests, the two male characters in this dance presentation are related, and the program explicitly dedicates the piece to all brothers. Through a combination of acrobatics, martial arts and movement, the dancers oscillated between play fighting and genuine camaraderie. The result was a

Shakespearean-flavored, somewhat homoerotic moving body sculpture piece.

The final and longest piece, *Old Country*, had its moments, but it tended to be a touch over-dramatic and angst-ridden, with no clear indication what was causing the angst and no indication that it would ever end. The choreography was frequently interesting and surprising, but eventually

became stylistically repetitive. The piece was developed to represent the nature of a people just prior to the Second World War, and the dancers were more or less successful in creating an apocalyptic mood.

Overall, the performance was an enjoyable one, particularly because I had gained some insight into the process of choreographing such dance pieces as a result of the composition workshop. An innovative choreographic process has, for the most part, led to an original and daring product.

Kaeja d'Dance will perform new shows on March 7-8, and April 11-12.

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## Is the room still here?

BY PAUL LEWANDOWSKI

Last time I checked, the room was still there, but Samuel Beckett was not so sure. Last Sunday night, the St. Mary's Art Gallery hosted Beckett's *That Time* as a segment of the Halifax Festival of Time Based Art.

*That Time* is a two-person production which examines the relation of mind to body, by portraying the listener and the voice as two separate entities.

The set of the play is relatively simple in terms of setting and presentation — the only visual is a head floating twelve feet above the stage.

The head is the listener — portrayed brilliantly by Michael Fernandes — and it reacts to a voice (Andrew Forster) which represents the listener's memories. Although the voice represents part of the listener, the two remain very distinct. Beckett uses these two beings to examine the human condition of isolation — a recurring theme in his work.

The head remains static throughout the performance, except for the occasional face and eye movements, which imply that the listener is "waking up" as the voices fade in and out.

The memories come from various times in the listener's life, hence *That Time*, and are bonded by a single condition — solitude.

Of particular interest is the production's lighting, which plays tricks on the audience. The listener's face appears to lose its form to the light, and coupled with the voice, which is sometimes hypnotic, the effect pushes the viewer into what Beckett refers to as "the void." The audience is forced to reassess the time and place.

The voice, which was pre-recorded, shifts between speakers on the left and right of the stage, effectively giving the impression of overlapping thoughts. Using this method, the voice fades from past memories to present, until the thoughts begin to refer to themselves, and eventually dissolve into silence and darkness.

What Beckett's play lacks is closure, but perhaps this was by design. The audience stumbled for several long moments before realizing that the performance had ended. To this effect, Andrew Brouse — the recording and lighting technician — did not immediately lift the lights, furthering our confusion.

*That Time* was the perfect dramatic addition to the Festival of Time Based Art, both in content and quality. The elegance with which Fernandes, Forster and Brouse handled Beckett was in tune with the themes and artwork of the festival and organizers could not have asked for a better performance.

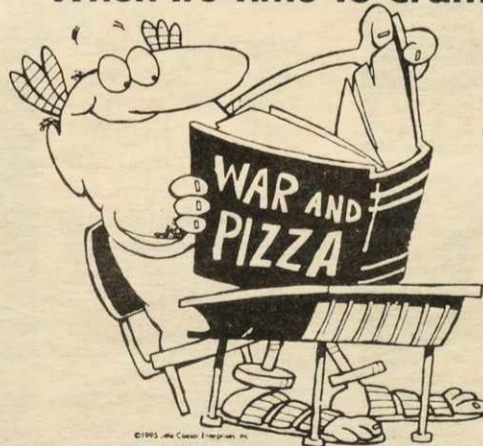
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