

Kids' choreography is like pennies from heaven

YOUTH

BY JUDITH STILES

When a handful of pennies are thrown across a stage, they spin and zigzag and land in random patterns, which is precisely what the young choreographers did at Loco-Motion Dancer Theater Arts School when they were trying to get inspiration for their dance called "Chasing The Rainbow."

Last September, 15 dancers ranging from 8 to 10 years old began the creative process of defining this dance, simply starting with a handful of pennies. After nine months of preparation, 14 pieces were recently performed at the Frederick Loewe Theatre in Greenwich Village, choreographed by young people ages 6 to 14, who danced their hearts out, giving birth to an extraordinary performance. Loco-Motion Dance Theatre is a well-kept secret and one of the best performing arts programs for young people in New York City. It is a true greenhouse of dance that nurtures creativity in every child who participates.

Last fall, in the basement of St. Veronica's Church on Christopher St., a group of young dancers began the creative process as they observed the patterns of the pennies; and then imitated them through improvisational movement, in what they called workshops. With the help of their gifted teacher, Lisa Pilato, each individual began "to feel certain movements that kept coming back to them and repeating," describes Pilato, as she explains how they began to shape their dance. As they watched each other and discussed their ideas, the recurring theme of a circus kept popping up.

In December, a 9-year-old dancer, Zeke St. John, observed the workshop and commented, "It almost works, but the spatial patterns are not quite right." The circus theme kept buzzing in their brains so they Googled circus props and landed on the idea of using ribbons on a stick with large colorful exercise balls. After a lot of improvisational exploration, brothers Jonathan and Nick Barnes decided they wanted to add to the collaborative dance rhythmic patterns of bouncing a basketball, combined with leaping and jump-

Frou Frou. Emma Jean Taylor, Rosa Bluestone Perr, Jane O'Hara and DeVincenzi choreographed this complex and riveting dance about relationships. Through pairing and clustering they gave a moving description of the ups and downs of friendship.

In what some of the dancers referred to as their protest dance, called "Stand Up," the choreographers demonstrated bold movements holding placards with messages such as "Black Man 4 President" and "Say NO To The Third Grade Test." Dancers Hallie Justice, Bibi Lewis, Samantha Paltrow-Krulwich and Greta Quinn have been with Loco-Motion for years and felt free enough to spearhead this highly original dance that eloquently shouted (through movement) — "Listen to the children for once." Carol Kramer and the Barnes brothers added a zesty hip-hop break dance riff to "Strut" that was danced to the jumpy tune "Stray Cat Strut" by the Stray Cats. In the piece called "Soaring," young Lily Rubin-Miller smiled with her entire body, sprightly moving to the music, expressing that she too was born to dance.

If you missed this performance, you missed a jewel of a show, but don't fret, because a shortened version of "Dance Makers & Ground Breakers" will be performed outdoors along the Hudson River on Mon., June 13 at 4 p.m. Walk straight along Christopher St. to the river, and on the grassy pier, a few steps north of Christopher St., you can enjoy the remarkable and imaginative work of these young choreographers.

For more information about this performance and their upcoming theater piece called "Four Auditions," facilitated and written by Obie award-winning playwright Brenda Currin, visit their web site, www.loco-motiondancetheatre.org.



Phoebe DeVincenzi in "Solamente" at Loco-motion's "Dance Makers & Ground Breakers" performance

When the music got to the part of "Why oh why can't I" the audience swooned with admiration for this young girl who was born to dance. Phoebe DeVincenzi also performed a solo to the lively music of Sergio Mendes with all eyes on her vast repertoire of upbeat snakelike moves, reminiscent of both salsa and belly dancing. In the piece called "Free," the veteran dancers who have been with Pilato for over seven years, picked their own music, "Let Go" by

ing. Through choreography, each child was encouraged to find his or her own voice as if they were reading excerpts from their diary. There are 75 dancers who faithfully attend classes every week, thirsty for the experience of working with Pilato. "The process is very different with each age group," stresses Pilato, as she explains that with the 6- and 7-year-olds she places an older lead dancer in the class to work with and inspire the new dancers. Nine-year-old Kira Yearwood was the performance assistant for "Harmony," in which the youngest children explored movement in the jungle, and then after months they chose an animal such as a tiger or a baboon to recreate a wild energy through dance.

Wearing rainbow tights and skirt, young Tsiann Hills choreographed a joyous and innocent dance to a haunting folk rendition of "Over the Rainbow" by late Hawaiian singer Israel Kamakawiwo'ole.

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