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Reviewed by: Claudia Smith Brinson

Hip Hoppin' to La Traviata

Rubberbandance Group, which performs again Sunday and Monday, offers a sense of humor with its troupe's athleticism and grace. No matter what the movement -- an angular reach from modern dance, a balletic kick or a spin on shoulder or head -- the dancers are up to all challenges, and it's a joy to watch.

Formed in 2002 by Victor Quijada, choreographer and co-artistic director, Rubberbandance Group captured the audience in its Spoleto opening with its first offering, "Secret Service," performed to Sergei Prokofiev's "Dance of the Knights" from "Romeo and Juliet." Sometimes in dance, choreography and music seem twinned; the dancers so in sync to the rhythms that the music seems to emanate from their bodies. That's how "Secret Service" worked.

Quijada started out in hip hop clubs and marries that style of movement with classical music to great effect in this program, tagged "Elastic Perspective."

Quijada, who danced in "Secret Service" as well as the following "Meditations on the Gift," offered a solo in "Exercise in Wholeness and Awareness." Performed to Saul Williams' "Ohm" (as in a measure of electrical resistance), the dance begins with the sound of Tibetan monks chanting. The dance is performed in a grid of light and dark, conveying both spiritual imprisonment and escape.

The audience took greatest pleasure from the sly jokes about relationships, played out most effectively when Lila-Mae Talbot danced with Joe Danny Aurelian, also known as B-boy Dingo. An excerpt from "Hasta la Proxima," a finalist in the 2004 American Choreography Awards, begins with a woman's voice asking, "Okay if I manipulate you?" The poor guy's reply, not quite a protest, "I'm fragile," is met with "You can trust me." The audience knows what's coming, and it's fun to watch Talbot shape and reshape Aurelian.

But the big hit was the last performance (a good way to say good-bye), "The Traviattle," also performed by Aurelian and Talbot. To the familiar melodic explosions of "La Traviata," the duo challenges the audience to reconsider or see fresh hip hop, juxtaposing talent and the new with the old, beloved and once -- but not after Rubberbandance gets hold of it -- familiar.