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Rubberbandance's humor, humanity no stretch

By **TRESCA WEINSTEIN**, Special to the Times Union

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BECKET, Mass. – Ballet dancers balance on the tips of their toes; hip hop dancers, on the tops of their heads. The members of the Canadian troupe Rubberbandance Group, onstage at Jacob's Pillow through Sunday, do both, and also take weightlessness a few dozen steps farther, defying gravity with humor and humanity as well as power and grace.

The evening-long work "Punto Ciego" (Blind Spot), choreographed by Victor Quijada, who codirects the company with Anne Plamondon, combines the freshness and spontaneity of street dance (Quijada was a b-boy in Los Angeles before signing on with Twyla Tharp and later Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montreal) with the rigor of ballet and the offbeat inventiveness of avant-garde theater. Videotaped sections add another layer and sometimes serve to break the third wall; at one point, Quijada, live on stage, has a discussion with the onscreen image of himself, who in turn addresses the audience.

We also get two versions of Quijada interviewing Plamondon on a talk-show set--one exchange full of genuine emotion and the other edited and remixed into a parody of itself. The sofa on which the two sit during the interview (a taped version of which plays simultaneously on a screen hanging above their heads) unexpectedly takes on a life of its own, becoming a moving prop that the dancers cartwheel over and slide beneath. The score by award-winning DJ Jasper Gahunia incorporates scratching, sampling, rhythmic static and static-y rhythms.

All of this is interesting, but what gives it depth and a foundation to rest on is the riveting intensity of the dancing itself. Quijada--who in his L.A. days was nicknamed Rubberband for his innovative break-dancing style--has created a unique movement fusion that has the dancers flipping upside down, dropping to the floor, changing direction with each step and seeming to float or pour through the air, landing silent and cat-like on the ground. Yet somehow none of it feels showy, not even the handstands.

Duets are particularly stunning, as in a section in which the ensemble forms three couples (Plamondon and Quijada, Louise Michel Jackson and Frédéric Tavernini, Lila-Mae G. Talbot and Mariusz Ostrowski), each framed in an oblong of light. Each pair's relationship and exchanges of weight are informed by the spaces they make with the angles of their trunk and limbs, making passages through which they travel through the maze of each other's bodies, never losing contact.

In one duet, Plamondon and Quijada move in syncopated rhythm timed to the other's hand clapping; in another, he starts out dressed in a sport jacket and after a few liquid moves, she's the one wearing it--and she gives a little satisfied grin. This is what dancing might look like on the moon, but it's also what real people act like on earth.

Tresca Weinstein is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to the Times Union.

Dance review

Rubberdance

Where: Jacob's Pillow, 358 George Carter Rd., Becket, Mass.

When: 8:15 p.m. Thursday

Length: 1 hour and 40 minutes, no intermission

Repeats: 8:15 p.m. tonight and Saturday; 2:15 p.m. Saturday; 5 p.m. Sunday

Tickets: \$33

Info: (413) 243-0745 or <http://www.jacobspillow.org>