

New moves, new music transport Attack Theatre's audience

By Jane Vranish
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It's not often that a company can be so generous with, even eager to please its audiences, but still be daring enough to lead them on a journey that breaks new artistic boundaries.

So it was with Attack Theatre in "Preserve and Pursue" at the New Hazlett Theatre on Saturday night. Yes, they were preserving traditional elements, like Bizet's "L'Arlesienne" and Japanese myth. But it was the wild and woolly pursuit of new dance angles and new music that, given the range of work, remained nearly perfectly balanced.

Some audience members could have been struck by the thunderclap that began "The Lady from Arles," a piece that was inspired by the group's recent appearance with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

But this encore bore little resemblance to the original. It now whirled around Michele de la Reza, a scarlet woman who bore the guilt of infidelity and grasped a tattered red umbrella. It was filtered through Dave Eggar's edgy variations on Bizet's music, almost like a carnival atmosphere at times.

Peter Kope returned with an encore, "Ralph," a tribute to his father. It now strengthened its

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personal take on the father/son relationship, with Kope as the concerned father and Jeff Davis expertly shouldering the initial rebellion and growth of the son's role.

The women took over at the start of the second half of the program for the premiere of "A Furious Wind," inspired by a Japanese myth involving a whimsical connection between Raijin (god of thunder and lightning), Fujin (god of wind) and the protection of a young girl's bellybutton.

Words cascaded down a cylindrical screen surrounding Eggar, physically barefoot and musically virtuosic in a colorful duet with composer Miyuki Ito, who maneuvered the electronics. They appeared to warn a young Liz Chang as she wrote in her journal on a bench below. De la Reza and Ashley Williams, playing the god-like creature, flitted around her in kimono-like costumes. Their lightness and quick-witted movements struck the right note, but the seriously fearful Chang could add the energy of youth to her movement palette.

The program ended with the sublime "Trapped," where a quartet of performers seemed to be encased by moving rectangles

of light (Kevin Matz' designs were inventive throughout the evening). With the overall atmosphere of separation and regret, most often the dancers missed connections or deliberately avoided them.

Often their surging movement added another percussive element to Somei Satoh's translucent score, played by Eggar; violinist Tom Chiu and pianist Douglas Levine. Certain transitions were poetic beyond words.

All in all this was a very impressive program, exploring personal relationships in a powerful global way. Kudos to the Attack team, also including Jim Mueller's video design and Dave Bjornson's sound design. Even the stage crew transitions drew attention, with an "Arles" spin-off into "Ralph" and a jazz duet between percussionist Jeff Berman and electric bassist Tom Pirozzi (listen for his chordal riffs) in the second half.

Perhaps the best balance of all came from the creativity and respect between these dancers and musicians — is there a more talented combination out there?

Attack Theatre's "Preserve and Pursue" will be presented at the New Hazlett Theatre Tuesday and Wednesday at 7 p.m. Call 412-394-3393 or visit www.proartstickets.org.

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