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## DANCE REVIEW

# Streb delivers on bold experiment

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STAFF DANCE CRITIC

The renovated Nazareth College Arts Center transformed into a gladiator playground on Friday night.

The Brooklyn-based STREB Extreme Action dance company took over the theater for the world premiere performance of *STREB: Forces*, the main event of Nazareth's inaugural dance festival.

The performance, which repeats tonight, also marks the company's first fully loaded production, which brought together Broadway technicians to create what founder and Penfield native Elizabeth Streb calls a movical — a theatrical experience of extreme movement.

The theater's renovations are put to the ultimate test with this production. A metal truss, providing a walking plank, frames a square white wall background.

At times, dancers smacked into it and climbed it as it was tilted.

At others, video is projected onto its surface. Montages of Streb, a State University College of Brockport graduate, help to bide time between scene changes and explain her motivations. Close-up video during the sequences magnify the danger. Above it, lights beam around the theatre like a rock show.

To the side of a stage is the DJ booth, where electronic sounds mix with the movement and help heighten the thuds of bodies against hard surfaces. The ground is outfitted with mats, spring boards and beams. Behind the imposed white wall sits a human-sized hamster wheel, called a whizzing gizmo, which is revealed when the wall suddenly rises out of view for the show's final act. There wasn't an inch of space on the stage unused.

The entire show consists of 13 movement sequences, all experimentations in momentum, force, fear, and, at times, comedy. The audience verbally screamed and cheered with the eight dancers as they flung themselves high in the air, landing like a pancake with hard smacks onto the ground and right on top of each other. Or as they ducked rotating rungs of metal milliseconds before it smacked into their heads.

Or as one dancer, Casandre Joseph, backflipped off the top of the flying whizzing gizmo, only to land flat on its metal surface as it continued around like a ferris wheel.

There were times when I had to look away from the stage in fear that one of the dancers would be maimed. The company commands attention with an ease that would make most dance companies jealous.

The dancers aren't quite gymnasts, or aerialists, or even, say, dancers. They're a weird conglomeration of athlete and artist, a new species of movement experts.

They were outfitted in individual action hero costumes, fittingly created by designer Andrea Lauer, known for her work on Broadway's *American Idiot*. There's no acting on stage; the dancers perform as themselves, individual in size, height, background and even weight. Dancers talk on stage, cheering each other on and calling out cues. You hear them grunt and scream. Nothing is hidden. The audience is not asked to be quiet or to pay attention.

This is the remixed version of a dance concert, a show made for today's fast-moving, commercial world. But for all its excitement, it also explores the fundamental, intellectual aspect of the human experience of movement. □

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Streb

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