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\\ Tuesday July 27, 2010

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Northwest New Works Series 2010, On the Boards June 6 & 13

Contemporary artists have a lot on their plate. Not only has the current economic meltdown made their lives more precarious than ever, they have also been faced with an increasingly apocalyptic world as a looming, correlative subject. If there were any lingering doubts that today's performance artists and choreographers were addressing such matters, these would have been quickly dispelled at this year's Northwest New Works Festival at On the Boards, held during the weekends of June 4-6 and June 11-13. The majority of these local artists, most of them familiar to audiences in Seattle, have stepped up to the unprecedented challenges we face, though some with far more success than others.

The first weekend's studio showcase, held in the small downstairs stage, was the strongest of the four performance sets. Between the four performers - The Mint Collective, Paul Budraitis, Mike Pham, and The Cherdonna and Lou Show - there was sufficient rage, sorrow, and humor to capture the absurdity of the historical moment.

The last work of the evening was choreographer Mark Haim's rollicking *This Land Is Your Land*. Set to a series of mostly uninspired country songs, it followed a very simple formula. A motley group of dancers - many of them familiar to Seattle audiences - emerged from behind a curtain with broad vertical stripes, briskly walking forward then backwards (though slightly to the right) over and over again before retreating behind the screen. After disappearing, they would reemerge; first with Starbucks drinks, then with fashionable clothes, again naked, then in black, and finally reverting to casual. Before departing, they tossed their paper and recyclable corn-cups with green straws into an overflowing trash can.

The piece was less a critique of contemporary American life than a gentle exploration of its absurdity. After a long evening of grim but mostly compelling work, it lifted everyone's spirits. Regardless of the degree to which we buy into the madness, we will continue to march on - even if we don't know why.

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