

Dance companies save \$ this summer

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Flash Review 1, 7-13: Child's Play -- NOT
Haim and Pilobolus Too up the Anti for Kids' Dance

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My last Flash Review reported on the unfortunate closing of Soundance studio and made mention of similar stories in both New York and San Francisco, as inflated rents force small, intimate performance spaces to disappear. (See [Flash Review 1, 6-26: The Last Dance](#).) Given the concern over how such a loss of performance space will affect audience opportunity to be exposed to a variety of dance forms, it was especially encouraging to attend two performances this week that focused precisely on expanding the audience for dance. Both Mark Haim's performance at the Lincoln Center Institute and Pilobolus Too's matinee at the Joyce Theater aimed to educate and inspire young audiences. At a time when the future of dance feels uncertain in many, primarily economic, ways, there is no better audience to reach out to than the future audience.

Nurturing a young audience not only benefits dance in the long run, but it also has a powerful and immediate impact on students' learning and development. This is the cornerstone of the Lincoln Center Institute's philosophy of "aesthetic education," which maintains that each child has the ability to respond to a work of art in a highly personal, multi-faceted way. Exposure to a work of art raises questions, challenges preconceived notions, and sparks new perceptions. This, in turn, strengthens students' abstract thinking and problem-solving skills, which are necessary throughout their entire education as well as in daily life. LCI stresses experiential learning and active engagement on the students' part. As executive director Scott Noppe-Brandon explained at the beginning of Mark Haim's performance, "We want to not just look at a work of art, but to look through it.... We're here not to teach students to step back and revere works of art, but to give them a safe environment in which to ask questions of the work."

Founded nearly 25 years ago, LCI has been replicated 17 times around the U.S. and has developed a myriad of programs to address its mission. Central to these

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is the selection of repertory to be shown first at the summer session for teachers, performed at the Institute during the academic year, and then toured to participating schools.

Mark Haim's performance on Tuesday morning marked the opening of LCI's summer session and served to introduce his material to an audience of educators.

Accompanied by pianist Andre Gribou, Haim performed selections from his masterful solo work set to Bach's "The Goldberg Variations." In its entirety, the piece is 80 minutes long and follows the structure of Bach's music, with 30 variations ranging from one minute to ten minutes in length. For this performance context, however, Haim chose to involve audience participation, asking four volunteers to pick the variations they wanted to see, in any order. I was initially disappointed to not see the work in its entirety, fearing it would be difficult to assess the choreography without a sense of its intended continuity and progression. Nevertheless, I was astonished at Haim's ability to seamlessly move backwards and forwards within his lengthy solo, jumping from the Opening Aria to variation 15 to 28 to 27 to 9 and so on. Though I would have loved to have seen the compositional arc of the solo from beginning to end, I came to realize that the separate variations are choreographic gems in and of themselves.

Furthermore, the contrasting variations enabled Haim to demonstrate his incredible range as a performer. In the Opening Aria, he moved with simple elegance, standing in a single spotlight, his arms opening slowly from over his head, like feathers dropping softly to his sides. In variation 15, he crossed upstage in profile, with exact precision, as if part of an Egyptian frieze, and then retrograded his steps back to the beginning pose. Variation 28 showed great dynamic variety. Haim balanced on one leg, the other raised, foot flicking the air with rhythmic accents, which he then alternated with fluid ripples and undulations through his torso and head.

After completing nine variations, Haim announced that the next variation was one in which he wouldn't move at all, rather the audience was invited to come onstage and move him. Thus, he literally embodied LCI's ideal of an experiential, hands on encounter with a work of art. The volunteers loved it; people laughed and called out comments. Scott Noppe-Brandon's point about "not teaching kids to step back and revere a work of art," but rather to get involved with it, became very clear. While Haim was being moved about the stage, Gribou played an exquisite Bach composition on the piano and the audience played with their own composition in space. There was a real sense of art as experience. Art as play. It was wonderful.

Wednesday afternoon's performance of Pilobolus Too was also filled with a sense of play -- play with props, play with bodies as shapes, play with implied narrative through costume, character development, and facial expression. Although the Pilobolus Too program was billed simply as a family matinee during Pilobolus's Joyce Season, P. Too has a very specific outreach and education mission. Founded in 1997 as a two-person performing company, P. Too is designed for smaller or less well-equipped venues, thereby allowing the company to show its work in more rural and under-served areas. Like the Lincoln Center Institute, P. Too also has a school performance component. After an in-school performance, the dancers will often work with the students, teaching them basic weight-bearing

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