

# Newsday

**DANCE REVIEW** 'Thin Air' marks what's out of sync and intriguing

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Oct 12, 2007



Julie Alexander, Hristoula Harakas and Antonio Ramos, background, in 'Thin Air,' playing at Dance Theater Workshop through Saturday, Oct. 20.

Donna Uchizono's "Thin Air" opens with its three dancers perched on step ladders shaking their heads. The ladders are the usual, sturdy kind while the head-wagging is not. It indicates some kind of muscular tick, not "No, no, no." The disconnect - between ladder and head, and head and brain - aptly introduces Uchizono's intriguing, perplexing and comic catalog of the out-of-sync.

The shattered, repetitive score by experimental composer Fred Frith seems to be perpetually addressing an unanswerable question, which perpetually throws it off course. Gorgeous yet pockmarked, the music begins again - and again - from a new angle.

The dancers seem to have a relationship with the music -

until it stops and they continue, impervious to the change.

For a while, at least, the dancers' activities seem of a piece. The scaled-down dancing often centers on a single body part at a time: for example, a twitchy butt. Plus, there are a lot of minute rearrangements. The dancers adjust fraught limbs, their proximity to each other and their intense yet impassive gaze, as well as the stage's arctic surface of white plastic. But once this subtle mode has firmly established itself, Antonio Ramos, formerly of Stephen Petronio's high-octane troupe, blows it to bits with an insistent tour de force of lashing legs and multiple turns in the air.

The dancers' apparent discombobulation toward their bodies proves the most pervasive and disturbing disconnect in the hour-long work. In one especially engrossing section, Julie Alexander and the simultaneously sensual and severe Hristoula Harakas perform an ode to toes. Shoulder to shoulder like school girls, with their hair in their eyes, they explore variations on the theme of a toe's wriggle and scrunch until there's nothing to do but move up to the shins and eventually the knees. With Uchizono's trademark obsessiveness, the duet mesmerizes by minimalist means, allowing our minds to approach mindlessness without getting lost.

It's almost possible at this moment to imagine the schism between body and mind mending, except that the women never take their eyes off their feet, as if these appendages didn't entirely belong to them.

Uchizono has been choreographing for more than two decades, most recently for Mikhail Baryshnikov's Hell's Kitchen Dance. She is the master of the non-evident. Even when a dance transfixes throughout, you don't always know what it's about until it is over.

The challenge that she has set herself with "Thin Air," however, is extreme even by her own rigorous standards. The danger - or maybe the glory - of a piece about how things don't quite add up is that it can reproduce in the viewer the very experience it's describing.

By the end of "Thin Air," I'm shaking my head.