

# The San Diego Union

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## Uchizono company displays skill, wit

By Anne Marie Welsh  
Arts Critic

Sushi opened its ninth Neofest last night with two exciting new dances by Donna Uchizono and her New York company. She's definitely a choreographer to watch as well as a performer of enormous skill and wit.

The short program, to be repeated tonight and Saturday, included her solo for hips "Siren" and a 45-minute

### Dance review

tour de force for the company derived from similar hula material and called "San Andreas."

Uchizono's four dancers look young, fresh and unaffected, a new generation really, performing in that loose-limbed, throwaway style familiar since Twyla Tharp, though with fantastic speed, rhythmic accuracy and deadpan wit.

By turns elegant and frenetic, the troupe of five can seem fifteen when the choreography sends them reeling like shock waves from a temblor. Their hands keep doing odd things too, becoming claws-turned-wings, for instance, or chattering in finger code like Cambodians.

Uchizono has a strong feeling for contrasts: abandon and elegance, speed and languor, introversion and openness. The substratum for "San Andreas" is a slow thudding walk, insistent as a drum in its rhythm, which explodes into high-speed, spasmodic running.

The sudden eruptions send the dancers flinging and flailing throughout space and onto the floor, as if their emotional worlds are falling apart. But unlike San Diego's John Malashock and other practitioners of a new romanticism, Uchizono dancers are emotionally neutral; the formal values of her choreography suggest the relationships and emotional upheavals.

Uchizono opens "San Andreas" with a back-to-the-audience solo set to Tahitian drum music. One hip juts out, farther then farther, and ethnic dancing gets anatomized drolly, yet with respect, the way Mark Morris might do it.

Because of her obsession with rhythm in these two pieces, the folk element is always close to the surface. At one point in "San Andreas," she and the male dancers perform a corny, slow-motion hula. Uchizono sings the lyrics (off-key to electronically altered traditional music) while others casually pick up the sinuous arm gestures, the swirling undulations and rotations of the pelvis.

It's funny and graceful and sad, like an old song remembered slightly differently by friends. And like everything else, the hula disintegrates.

Tom Cora's progressive musical score is for cello and percussion. When the strings take over "San Andreas" can be lyrical (though never mushy) as in a duet for Phillip Adams and Conor McTeague or a trio for the three women.

Uchizono transforms gesture into dance movement, grounding an essentially abstract dance in the familiar. Its feeling of variety and invention comes from skillful repetition and variation of a few movement themes, so as "San Andreas" unfolds, the tectonic plates shifting, it also keeps returning to familiar images.

Last night's crowd was small. But like a good stiff breeze, Donna Uchizono's dances bode well for Sushi as it launches another Neofest.