



Ecstatic Visages: Laura Dean's *Infinity* at ADF

by Kate Dobbs Ariail

July 20, 2009, Durham, NC: Art is good for a lot of things; one of them is immersing us in irreducible joy. Under the direction of Rodger Belman, both the ADF student dancers on stage, and the audience in Reynolds Theater, were plunged into a sonorous, joyous cosmos with the first performance of Laura Dean's reconstructed 1990 dance, *Infinity*, the centerpiece of the [American Dance Festival's Past/Forward](#) program this season. Dean also composed the patterned music-of-the-spheres which led and followed the dancers, and which at times seemed visible itself, flowing like the Milky Way among the travelling bodies on their fixed, if heavenly, paths.

Belman, a former member of [Laura Dean Dancers and Musicians](#), is well-placed to return this powerful dance to the stage. He had danced in the [July, 1990 ADF-commissioned premiere](#) of *Infinity*, and he has been involved with reviving several of Dean's other works, some of which have been seen at ADF in recent years. For this project, he collaborated with the musicians from the original — Jason Cirker, Michael Cirker, and Matthew Spataro — who performed in the wings, and who had a great deal to do with the spiking endorphin levels in the theater. Of the Dean reconstruction projects undertaken thus far, even including the ravishing ballet *Night* (performed by Aspen Santa Fe Ballet [earlier in the season](#)), *Infinity* best shows the choreographer's great talents and is, in itself, an argument for art preserving its past even while forging forward.

Patterning is an organization of multiple rhythms to serve a greater purpose, and nowhere is that more evident than in dance. The best pattern-making has an inevitability about it — you feel that this line *must* go just there; that those shapes *must* transpose just so; that the density of the field *must* condense or expand in its particular way. These young dancers — their sleek velocity made them seem more numerous than ten — weave pattern's motion into a radiant, spinning, spiraling transcendence of invisibility. The dance may be a parable of wonder and faith in an ever-expanding cosmos, but the ecstatic faces of the dancers as they whirled declared a universal happiness in being here now, at the center of *Infinity*.

The beauty of *Infinity* was perhaps even more appreciated than it might have been, as it followed on the heels of Faye Driscoll's ADF-commissioned premiere, *There is So Much Mad in Me*. This is art with a very different purpose — that of “keeping it real,” reflecting life as it is, decrying hypocrisy, rebelling against outdated forms, and such like, while maintaining a non-idealizing stance and perhaps stamping a jack-boot at the idea that art could be many things other than coarse, poorly-crafted, banal and historically ignorant. Watching the piece was a lot like watching a wilding by a bunch of uncivilized, amoral middle-schoolers — and oh yes, it included screaming. If it had been raining, I would have gone outside at intermission and cleaned myself of its residue.

The evening ends with a far more evolved new dance-theater work, by Miami artist [Rosie Herrera](#). *Various Stages of Drowning: A Cabaret* was composed earlier this year; the ADF brought Herrera to Durham to stage it with student dancers. Strange and adventurous, bright and cheeky, then comically dark in its humor, the piece is as much dance as it is

theater, and is as highly theatrical as it is booty-shaking-kinetic. It is filled with bright color, great costumes, engaging, bizarre imagery and peculiar skits and is hugely ambitious and skilled in its scope. However, it is not quite perfected: the hinge scene involving ten pink cakes, during which the tone changes radically, drags on and too much energy dissipates before the final stage of drowning. Let's hope the ADF brings Herrera back next year: this artist knows things and has something to say about them.

This production continues through July 22. See our [calendar](#) for details.

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