

## TBA '08: Festival ends with a flourish

By Grant Butler

September 14, 2008, 3:30PM

Grant Butler, The Oregonian

Members of the Third Angle New Music Ensemble experiment with the art of noise during a performance Sunday in the middle of the Lovejoy Fountain.

After 11 days of performances and a splashy grand finale through the fountains of downtown Sunday afternoon, the curtain has come down on the sixth edition of the **Portland Institute for Contemporary Art's Time-Based Art Festival**.

The wrap-up marks the end of Mark Russell's three-year stint as guest artistic director for the festival, and he leaves town on a high note, having just executed his most-focused and intriguing showcase to date.

Leah Nash, Special to The Oregonian

Khris Soden's walking tours of downtown showed the city's connections with Tilburg, Holland, but also aspects of our urban landscape that could only happen here.

During his tenure here, Russell has put an emphasis on both theater and American voices, with interesting themes emerging each year. TBA '06 featured deliriously fun performances by the cabaret act Kiki & Herb and the avant-garde troupe Nature Theater of Oklahoma, but also had an odd fixation with puppetry. A gripping performance by dance legend Mikhail Baryshnikov gave last year's festival plenty of buzz, but the curatorial emphasis was on epic productions that took hours and hours to complete their story arcs. One show, a verbatim reading of "The Great Gatsby," took more than seven hours to unfold, which is a whole lot of sitting for any audience, even an F. Scott Fitzgerald besotted one.

Axel Nastansky, PICA

Dancers in Sojourn Theatre's "Built" move over a diorama of the South Waterfront District.

For TBA '08, Russell delivered a slam-dunk -- and not just because the performance lengths were reined in. He's clearly gained an understanding of Portland during his numerous visits here (he never relocated from New York City, where his family lives), and that was reflected in curatorial choices of many shows that were directly linked to the places where they were performed. This year, TBA felt more like LBA -- Location-Based Art -- with site-specific pieces creating compelling conversations about community, citizenship and what makes the city tick.

### Defining community

The best example of this aesthetic was Portland's own **Sojourn Theatre** performing "Built," an experiential piece combining spoken word, dance, tight-rope walking and audience participation. In the potent setting of the salesroom for South Waterfront high-rise condo buildings, the performers raised issues about whether real communities can be developed from scratch, or if they can only develop slowly over years and decades, adapting to the changing needs of its citizenry.

This outlook was amplified by **Linda Wysong**, whose "Backyard Conversations" walking tours further explored what sort of neighborhood is emerging in the South Waterfront. On one tour, she took visitors up to the 18th floor of **The Ardea** apartment building to see the knockout views from a unit that will rent for \$3,350 a month when the building is completed. The district's residences, she noted, form a sort of high-rise gated community, adding that the district might never thrive if there's no diversity thrown into the mix.

Grant Butler, The Oregonian

Lynda Wysong gets to the heart of what makes a community with her "Backyard Conversations" walks.

"I think what this community needs are some poor people," she said.

Visual artist **Justin Gorman** mined location with his site-specific "Results Under Action." He erected billboard-sized paintings at various places around town, with their bold messages making statements about their surroundings and the history that factors into any place. One installation in a park in the South Waterfront included signs that said things like "Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!" and "Package deal," a sly commentary on the area's industrial past and its market-driven present.

Grant Butler, The Oregonian

Justin Gorman's temporary "Results Under Action" art installations capitalized on their

**Khris Soden's** fast-paced "The Portland Tour of Tilburg" delivered Portland locations in an entirely original way. This one-hour power-walk, which he conducted

locales.

power-walk, which he conducted numerous times throughout the entire festival, covered 2-1/2 miles

of downtown sidewalks, with a running commentary on what we would be seeing if we were actually on the streets of **Tilburg, Holland**, a city with many striking similarities to Portland. A stone's throw from the downtown strip joint Mary's Club, Soden described Tilburg's red light district. Other times, things didn't fit so neatly, like when a parking meter played stand-in for a statue commemorating World War II. But as he walked and talked, you gained a greater understanding of your own city.

The most-complicated of the site-driven works was "The City Dance of Lawrence and Anna Halprin," which attracted thousands during two free performances Sunday afternoon. This four-act performance featured dancers in and around the Ira Keller, Lovejoy and Source fountains, as well as Pettygrove Park, all designed by Lawrence Halprin, with live music by members of the **Third Angle New Music Ensemble**. The most effective sequence was choreographer Tere Mathern's full use of the Keller Fountain, with dancers climbing a rope ladder up its 20-foot-high walls, while cascades of water flew over them. The work not only paid tribute to an important piece of Portland architectural history, but echoed the history of TBA itself. The very first festival event in 2003 was a lush piece performed in the fountain at Jamison Square by Japanese dancers Eiko and Koma. "The City Dance" built beautifully on that legacy.

#### Acts from afar echo theme

It wasn't just the home team that plugged into locales. The setting of the Elizabeth Leach Gallery proved intrinsic to the plot of British performer **Tim Crouch**'s funny and harrowing "England." And the French experimental theater company **Vivarium Studio** took advantage of the giant picture windows at Pacific Northwest College of Art to stage their interactive piece "Enchantillons," during which people passing by on the sidewalk could change what actors were doing with a simple click of a computer mouse. Now that's taking art to the street level.

Not every TBA performance was rooted in place, of course. Among

the many highlights: The mesmerizing opening weekend concert by **Antony and The Johnsons** with the **Oregon Symphony**; the Israeli dance group **LeeSaar The Company**, using stunning movement to grapple with issues of gender identification; actor **Daniel Beatty**'s solo show "Resurrection," which explored the intersection between religion and ethnic food culture. And then there's **Neal Medlyn**, who gave the late-night venue The Works big bursts of energy, first doing his own recreation of a concert by pop singer Beyonce, complete with backup dancers and costume changes; then as the hyper-ecstatic co-host of the musical revue "Our Hit Parade," where he stripped down to a Hannah Montana t-shirt, then kept on going. Keep this wild man away from the Red Bull.

Next year there's a new hand at TBA's artistic helm. **Cathy Edwards**, who is the director of programming for the New Haven, Conn., **International Festival of Arts & Ideas**. A lot of her background is in presenting modern dance, so it's possible that her vision for the festival may involve more movement. But whether it's TBA or LBA or something else entirely, it should be fascinating to watch it take shape.

--Grant Butler: [gbutler@news.oregonian.com](mailto:gbutler@news.oregonian.com)

Leah Nash, Special to The Oregonian

Antony & The Johnsons' opening weekend concert with The Oregon Symphony proved to be one of the highlights of TBA '08.