



**TIED UP** Ricky Ruiz, Stacey Aung and Joseph Kudra, from left, weave their way through a piece to be featured this October at Redux2.

## Luck of the draw

Choreographers take their chances—and run with them. By **Vicki Crain**

Dance Chance, an emerging choreographers' lottery held at the Ruth Page Center for the Arts, has led to opportunity knocking. Center marketing director Silvino da Silva recalls how it opened doors for an early participant, former River North Chicago Dance Company member Monique Haley. "She'd never really choreographed before," da Silva says. Haley's artistic director at River North, Frank Chaves, attended the showing, saw Haley's work and hired her to make *Uhuru*, which premiered to acclaim at the Harris Theater in February 2009.

On Monday 13, three more local dancers hope to repeat history. Open mic-style, Dance Chance gives each artist 15 minutes to present a new work or work in progress; before and after, guest moderators facilitate audience engagement. At the end of the hour-long evening—which costs just three bucks—the next trio of participants is plucked out of a fishbowl filled with names volunteered by those present. By choosing the artists at random and allowing the audience to ask questions, Dance Chance boasts a grassroots style not seen at most dance shows. Venetia Stifler, executive and artistic director of the Center, says Dance Chance often sparks "audience-active" discussions

about what the choreographer was trying to do, educating both artists and viewers.

Stifler and DanceWorks Chicago artistic director Julie Nakagawa launched Dance Chance in March 2008. Twenty-six episodes later, 78 choreographers have presented work, from first-time choreographers and high-school students to undergrads and veteran performers. Fans of the monthly event have come to love its surprises and variety.

At work since getting their names drawn on July 13—Dance Chance took August off—are Joffrey Ballet dancer Derrick Agnoletti, David Schultz of Hubbard Street 2 and Western Michigan University senior Corey Neumann. Agnoletti has choreographed professionally for After School Matters and Joffrey outreach program Exelon Strobel Step-Up, but collaborating with advanced dancers is new. "I prefer to work with untrained dancers because I like movement that is almost primitive... [but] I'm trying to challenge myself," he says of his rewind solo *Retrograde*, to be danced by fellow Joffrey dancer John Mark Giragosian. (The work was made in sequence, but when he added a score by DJ Ben Drake, which has lyrics heard backward, Agnoletti was inspired to "take the choreography and reverse everything," he says.)

Last October, Dance Chance: Redux kicked off with two performances at

Northeastern Illinois University. Nakagawa and Stifler invited all Dance Chance participants from 2009 to apply to restage their work at the school's 450-seat auditorium in competition for \$1,000 for artistic development, awarded by a panel of judges. (Dance Chance: Redux2 happens October 16.) Another first-time choreographer and Joffrey dancer, Brian Gephart, was one of Redux's five finalists, but Stifler says he almost pulled his piece because it wasn't up to his own standards. Gephart reconsidered and ended up

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winning. "From a form and structure point of view, he had really done his work—it was wonderful," Stifler says. "He cared so much about what he was going to present."

Dance Chance's regular venue—the Center's cozy 218-seat ground-floor theater—and focus on feedback induce a productive atmosphere for the choreographers, no matter how skilled they are. "Looking at pieces that are not always successful is still useful," Stifler says. "The mere exploration of an idea has value and interest."

*Watch Retrograde and two more new works Monday 13 at the Ruth Page Center. See Listings.*