
Review: NECTAR Collaboration Exhibits ‘Affinity’ for Dance



by Justine Sutton, Noozhawk Contributor

October 26, 2012 | 8:06 pm

Anyone involved with the dance and arts community in town is probably familiar with NECTAR, a professional level artists’ forum taking place three or four times per year at [Yoga Soup](#).

Founded in 2009 by dancer and choreographer Cybil Gilbertson, NECTAR focuses on a theme each time, highlighting the work of a nonprofit organization connected with that theme. A representative is invited to speak briefly about the work of the agency, and a portion of the ticket proceeds is donated to that organization.

However, last Saturday saw a different kind of NECTAR as Gilbertson joined forces with [ArtBark International](#), co-founded by Misa and Stephen Kelly of Santa Barbara and Mojca Majcen of Slovenia. A new dance and physical theater company having grown out of [SonneBlauma Danscz Theatre](#), ArtBark has toured to Vienna and Paris through its ongoing [Affinity Project](#), and routinely works with artists in many parts of the world.

Already bursting with homegrown creative spirit, NECTAR was enriched this time by an exciting collaboration with ArtBark’s [Affinity III Festival](#), which brought dance companies from both coasts to perform alongside Santa Barbara talent and offered five events over five days, including NECTAR: Affinity.

Pre-show choreographic games gave audience members young and old a taste of dance-making, and a short film by Permaculture Dance Project of Salem, Ore., provided stunning visions of dancers all in white against natural landscapes, as well as gorgeous overhead shots of the dancers on a dark background.

Ramya Harishankar of [Arpana Dance Company](#) choreographed and performed an Indian dance interwoven with the telling of an Indian folk tale, with an impressive level of precision and warmth. Her performance was further enlivened by the ringing percussion of the bells on her ankles as she stomped rhythmically.

A dramatic effect here and with many other of the evening's performances was the stark shadows of the dancers cast against the white wall behind them.

Gilbertson herself offered up a dynamic yet delicate dance titled "No Death, No Transformation," with accompaniment by Paul Wehrman, including beat-boxing and reading of poetry. The two are partners in life as well as art, and welcomed their first child last year. The sweet bond between them was palpable as they began and ended the piece wrapped up together in a hug.

"Visions & Vortices for II" was a stunningly sinewy and powerful duet from **Movement Theatre CoLab** of Southern California, choreographed by Robert Salas and danced by Demitre Sullivan and Isla Maynard.

Another short film, *Whiskey Winter*, directed by Ted Mills, with dance direction and choreography by Robin Bisio, featured artful shots of dancers to the compelling music of **Ghost Tiger**. Preceding the showing, the audience was alerted that there was nudity involved, but apparently, NECTAR aficionados are not ones to run from the showing of a little skin.

NECTAR regular Valarie Mulberry shared two of her original songs, accompanying herself on guitar and harmonica. Her honey-smooth voice, which occasionally evokes **Michelle Shocked**, and quirky, good-natured lyrics are a pleasure. One song, simply titled "Island," was inspired by her time living on Maui, and the other by her nephew, Lake, a "Future Cowboy."

"The Presence of Absence" was created and performed by Trina Mannino of New York to text by Jack Kerouac and tinkling jazz piano. As she danced in front of projected video of city rooftops, Santa Barbara provided spontaneous soundscape embellishment in the form of a siren passing by. The inventiveness and mix of old-school and contemporary influences in this piece was enthusiastically appreciated by the audience.

Dance Entropy of New York presented two works by Valerie Green. "Con-Joined," danced by Kristin Licata and Julia Sabangan, was one of the most inventive dance pieces this reviewer has witnessed. To big brassy music, the two young women started out in similar oversized tank tops, and throughout the course of the imaginative duet these were doffed, tossed and traded, and in a struggle of togetherness the two eventually fought to get in and out of the same garment. This was truly a highlight of the evening.



Melissa Lynn Block dances her "power/less," a solo to a music mix by Misa Kelly using sounds gleaned from rehearsal sessions. (Kathee Miller photo)

The other piece, “Thread,” was danced by all three, and conjured up images of Grecian goddesses or muses — very graceful and flowing.

A core member of the NECTAR collective, Melissa Lynn Block danced her “power/less,” a solo to a music mix by Misa Kelly using sounds gleaned from rehearsal sessions. In a clay-red jumpsuit, Block moved with her trademark fluidity, ebbing and flowing with seeming effortlessness and strength.

As NECTAR celebrates its third birthday and moves forward with increasing vitality fueled by such collaborations, Santa Barbara audiences can look forward to more of these enlightening evenings.

— *Justine Sutton of Santa Barbara is a freelance writer and frequent [Noozhawk](#) reviewer.*



Kristin Licata and Julia Sabangan were mesmerizing in “Con-Joined.” (Kathe Miller photo)
