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## Chicago Dancing Festival coming into its own in 5th year

By Sid Smith, Special to the Tribune

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In the beginning, the Chicago Dancing Festival seemed almost a lark, a single program of modest best hits, more picnic dessert than entree.

How things change. This year, the 5-year-old enterprise is a full, weeklong festival boasting not just major troupes and classics, but unusual, provocative innovators, too. The results have been mixed, but the excitement immeasurable. At this midpoint of presentations building to Saturday's free, outdoor Pritzker Pavilion finale, here's a look at some offerings:

•**Doug Varone**, whose work we've seen too rarely, is an abstract artist gifted with a deep, underlying compassion. His 2006 "Lux" drifts in spots. But it glimmers, like the rising moon of his set, with deceptively carefree, magnificently lyrical movement, a tireless obstacle course aiming for spiritual reaffirmation. Set to Philip Glass, "Lux" is juggernaut and benediction, starring a shamanistic guide glimpsed briefly posing for crucifixion.

•**Brian Brooks'** duet from "Motor" is a retro-minimalist mini-masterpiece, wherein he and David Scarantino hop on one leg, alternating from one leg to the other, in total unison throughout, testing limits in muscle memory, counting and partnership. Clothed in black briefs, Brooks and Scarantino subtly, sublimely vary their routine, gradually injecting graceful swoops and other twists, for a complex, transcendent ode to simplicity.

•The terrific **Aspen Santa Fe Ballet** brought Spanish choreographer Cayetano Soto's "Uneven," an angular, original, darkly lit descendant of George Balanchine's Stravinsky ballets, replete with such odd gestures as one dancer's leg slyly sliding down another, all hauntingly accompanied by cellist Kimberly Patterson onstage.

•A rubbery mime and irresistible imp named **Adam Barruch** delivered a funny, extravagant and sometimes smartly crude solo to a song from "Sweeney Todd," running out of steam a bit, but flush with evidence he's a breath of fresh air to the art.

•**Walter Dundervill's** "Compressed Piece (Swan Lake)," the fest's first commissioned piece, is a mix of dance and installation art and a fizzle. To a score including Diana Ross and screechy takes on the original Tchaikovsky, "Piece" features Dundervill and Jennifer Kjos in mounds of elaborate white fabric, Kjos dragged offstage at the end as if in a giant bundle of laundry. Modestly amusing, maybe not irreverent

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enough, the work trod on deconstructionist ground broken long ago.

Remaining performances are 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University (waiting list only); 6 p.m. Friday at the Museum of Contemporary Art Stage (waiting list); and 7:30 p.m. Saturday at Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park. Free; more information at ***chicagodancingfestival.com***

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