



**HI, DESERT**

## AN UN-SUCKY SURPRISE

BY DANI KATZ

I've agreed to accompany my friend Daniel to the first Look to the Horizon: Scholarship Performance, and while I'm excited to share a cultural happening with an awesome human, my expectations are still hovering slightly below rock bottom. As a dance snob so often underwhelmed by the shows I frequent in New York and Los Angeles, I hardly expect Santa Fe's local teen contingent to dazzle me.

As much as my bad attitude is a reflection of idealistic standards of agility, expression and grace, it's a reaction to our culture's rapidly melting standards of excellence. Along with political correctness and molded push-up bras, a trumped-up benchmark of "equality" has seeped its way (read: been indoctrinated) into our collective consciousness, from which it oozes its icky,

sticky way into about a zillion other areas it doesn't belong.

The affliction is viral and contagious, kind of like herpes or cholera, only infinitely more destructive because where talent, discipline and hard work once moved us onward and upward, a "let's include everyone lest we get sued" approach

now runs the proverbial show, muddling us all in an ever-devolving sludge of status quo.

We're gathered at the James A Little Theater because a local kid named Reuben Rascon up and earned himself a scholarship to Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet—yes, the Bolshoi, of prima ballerinas and Alexander Gudinov and those legendary standards of excellence.

Well, at least one kid might not suck, I think, ever the judgy-pants snob-a-rina, silently snarking in the third row.

A tiny boy from Taos Pueblo, wearing face paint and ankle bells, kicks off the show, hopping and hooping while weaving ancient yarns in the shape of butterflies and clouds with an arsenal of colorful circles, as well as an impressive storehouse of stamina that keeps him jingling along to his moccasin-footed sister's drumbeats. Turns out the kid won third place in the world hoop-dancing competition earlier this year—yup, that world, as in the stunning, spectacular wheezing one we all share.

Then Rascon takes the stage, all classical ballet and Lycra and grace. As he wows the packed house with sky-high leaps and perfectly executed pirouettes—lots and lots of 'em—I realize I'm witnessing something rather spectacular.

The show is dense and dynamic, with more than a dozen vignettes performed by a truly eclectic sampling of Santa Fe's finest young dancers. They're not just decent; they're fantastic. And, they're even kind of representative. There's white and brown and black and yellow and short and not-so-short. There's flamenco and contemporary

and lyrical and breakdancing—yes, breakdancing, courtesy of the 3HC Holy Faith B-Boys, who take turns tearing up the stage while mugging and clapping and having a hell of a good time.

It's fun and it's fresh and it's real and it's getting under my skin. While I've yet to find a decent pad thai or a kickin' juice joint in this fragmented enigma of a town, it seems we're fat and full with dance—great dance, dance that raises the bar and invites its community to groove along and help hitch it even higher.

While the solos are renewing my faith in dance and kids and now and Santa Fe, it's ARCOS Dance company's "The Raven" that takes me over the edge to full-fledged enthusiast with a gorgeously executed homage to Edgar Allan Poe. Undoubtedly the most ambitious of the pieces, "The Raven" is dark and complicated, sparse and creepy, and pitch-perfectly, awe-inspiringly

fantastic. Performed in relative silence, overlaid with a recorded recitation of (yup, you guessed it) "The Raven," 20 young dancers clad in mottled gray unitards and painted black masks share the stage with a backward-facing armchair while bringing eerie synchronized



life to Poe's famous verse.

A bare-chested, kohl-eyed boy wrapped in black and red canvas straps balances on a narrow beam of wood and owns the stage while inspiring fantasies that could have me arrested.

Sure, there were the pretty privileged girls with perfect turnout and blank expressions, executing their choreographers' unrealized angst with technical prowess and emotional disconnect, but that's merely a matter of time. Give 'em a few years of real-world torment, plus a few helpings of failure, heartbreak and humiliation sprinkled with a dark night or two, and I've no doubt their otherwise empty grace will be transformed into expressive beauty and maybe even art.

In a time when mediocrity has been rebranded as achievement—and in a town where half of high school students are likely to drop out, and many of those who do manage to graduate can hardly craft a sentence, let alone conjugate one—the collective, expressive awesomeness that's come together for the first Look to the Horizon: Scholarship Performance is thoroughly unexpected and really, truly inspiring. It's especially so for me, down on lackluster Thai and so many would-be friends turned flakey no-shows, thoroughly enlivened to bear witness to a dance community steeped in talent, technique and real-deal goods, which has come together to support the hard-earned, real-deal achievements of one of its own with its own batch of hard-earned, real-deal excellence.

Thank God for small favors, especially the dancing kind.