

KANDINSKY TRIO

Kandinsky Beat Down: A concept done right

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In theory, Kandinsky Beat Down is a cool experiment, combining jazz and classical music with hip-hop and old-school soul and funk, and adding break dancers to punctuate the musical action.

It's also the kind of idea that could go awry in the wrong hands, creating a rhythmic and sonic mess.

But the smart, disciplined musicians and dancers on stage Saturday night at Jefferson Center's Shaftman Performance Hall made it fun and visually appealing.

Kandinsky Trio, a chamber group long in residence at Roanoke College, brought in some top henchmen, including Charlottesville-based trumpeter/composer John D'earth.

This program had no stringed bass instrument -- Kandinsky member Alan Weinstein's dark, round cello tones notwithstanding. But it had plenty of bottom end, courtesy of Shodekeh, a Baltimore beat-boxer who can do more with his mouth than a lot of drummers can do with a full drum set, grooving in basic 4/4 or the occasional odd-time signature.

On Dan Cavanaugh's "In the Silence," the trio and trombonist Jay Crone generated ominous beauty. An ancient poem of a bittersweet dream, "Nu'm Came in a Dream," flashed on an overhead screen.

Poetry re-emerged on D'earth's "Don't Let This Chance Go By," based on work by Kabir and a passage from James Joyce's "Ulysses." Here, soprano Nancy McDuffie joined the party, giving the music an ethereal quality. Shodekeh provided a solo highlight here, laying down the groove while playing a small set of wooden pipes.

Throughout, dancers The Boogaloo Crew added fun and athletic moves to the mix, engaging in a couple of breakdance battles that showed equal parts classical training and loose-limbed soul.

The full crew hit the stage to encore with "Flashlight," the old Parliament jam. Guitarist Cyrus Pace and Shodekeh drove it with the necessary funk, while D'earth and Crone were more than up for the horn shouts. The song was missing the signature Moog bass line, but in a good example of what this night was all about, McDuffie kind of stole the moment.

She wasn't trying to act like she'd just walked off the Mothership, but instead turned in a reading that was reminiscent of an Ed Wood movie soundtrack. It was kind of goofy but real -- a whole other kind of Mothership.