

# [DanceNOW \[NYC\] Festival: Opening Night](#)

## [Dancing Perfectly Free](#)

September 11, 2009



Gerald Casel Dance, photo by Ho Chang

The 15th annual [DanceNOW \[NYC\] Festival](#) kicked off at Dance Theater Workshop on Tuesday night with a full house. The festival format, which provides audiences with brief, seven-minute excerpts of dances from several companies (ten, in this case) over the course of an evening, creates a worthy challenge for choreographers: how to say more with less. Some pieces tried to say too much while others hardly said anything, but there were a few gems on opening night that were memorable and representative of the festival's mission: to connect new audiences and dance devotees to NYC's innovative dance makers while providing choreographers with an opportunity to share their work.

Bridgman/Packer Dance offered a stylized duet, *on/off/front/back*, that played with light and video to create the illusion of the dancers' limbs gliding through one another. It was fun and entertaining, but only for the first three minutes or so. Likewise, the humor in Paradigm's *A Thin Frost*, featuring three older women who articulated emotions through quirky vocalizations, dragged on a little too long. Dialogue interspersed with explosive dance in Johannes Wieland's *reality explodes in my face* was initially intriguing but became confusing and obscure, while Dietz Marchant's *Jamais Vu* lacked substance, but not sparkle, as the four dancers frolicked around with huge piles of silver tinsel.

The standout performance of the evening was David Parker's *Bang*, a 1991 duet for men in a love-hate relationship. Dressed in suits, Jeff Kazin and Nic Petry pounded their bodies into the floor as they continually interlocked and separated, remaining deadpan even as they noisily slammed their heads onto the ground. Another compelling performance was Sydney Skybetter's poignant solo for Kristen Arnold, from *The Personal*, which paired spiraling arms and her undulating torso with the flowing music of Schumann and Schubert. The other solo on the program, *Venus Through the Ages*, choreographed and performed by Ellis Wood, felt desperate and as if she were trying too hard to please.

In Mana Kawamura's *specimen*, five dancers twitched and threw themselves into tangled formations to an indecipherable score that blended the sounds of construction work with Beethoven, Bach, and Bjork. The meaning was unclear, but the complexity and multi-layered quality of the work was intriguing. And an excerpt from Gerald Casel's work in progress *Fluster* is the start of what will surely be a striking piece. The three men, dressed in white sweats, alternated between ensemble movement and more individualized solos that highlighted their technical prowess.

The festival continues through Saturday at [Dance Theater Workshop](#), and in late September and early October at two other destinations. [Details can be found here.](#)