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## CityDance Ensemble

*Review of June 13, 2008 concert 'The Songwriters' at Music Center at Strathmore*

**By Pamela Squires**

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Whatever CityDance Ensemble presents, the choreography sits on its dancers like a cat on an easy chair: The performers look comfortable, whether rendering early modern dance works or mounting a contemporary look at environmental disaster.

The performances are what made the program sparkle Friday at the Music Center at Strathmore. Nothing on this end-of-season program was entirely new, but no matter. Winning pieces from earlier in the season looked more polished (and left out were the clunkers). Kudos to Artistic Director Paul Gordon Emerson for having the wisdom to edit.

The program included two superb re-creations of signature works from social-protest choreographers Sophie Maslow and Jane Dudley, and works by Emerson (his serviceable "Born to Run," set to Bruce Springsteen music, and a resetting of his transcendent duet "Falling," danced to Otis Redding's "Try a Little Tenderness"). The program concluded with Brenda Way's "On a Train Heading South," a piece about global warming that still unfolds like an intelligent commentary, but without touching the heart.

The most significant parts of the evening, and by far the most significant events of the company's season, were the historical re-creations of Maslow's 26-minute "Folksay" (from 1942) for eight dancers and Dudley's 3 1/2 -minute solo "Harmonica Breakdown" (from 1938). "Breakdown" was danced with verve and sauciness by Alicia Canterna. The ensemble danced "Folksay," set to Woody Guthrie songs, with intelligence and heart.

CityDance Ensemble, which is devoted to history and reconstruction, showed us this season that "reconstruction" is a bit of a misnomer. In the modern dance world, reconstructing something from a much earlier era often implies that the work is unfashionable and out of step, a historical oddity of sorts. But these works by Maslow and Dudley have withstood the test of time and deserve to be performed more often.

How terrific it would be if more modern dance programs included some classics (classics from modern dance, that is) on their programs as a matter of course. Excellence is excellence, no matter what era it comes from. CityDance has done an excellent job of showing us that.

