

really help her career. "It used to be that you thought you would go to Altogether Different, tour, do three weeks at the Joyce and be a superstar," she said. "I think those days are dead and gone, and it's not really the Joyce's fault. There's virtually nowhere even sideways to move, let alone up."

She viewed her Altogether show as just another gig. "There is a sense that Altogether Different is a little bit like a one-night stand," Ms. Garfield said. "You wake up the next day and go, Oh! That was fun. But you're not really sure about where your relationship is going. There really should be a commitment on the part of presenters to nurture artists."

What's frustrating is that Altogether Different could reflect the exciting experimentation that is happening in New York. Along with Ms. Cook and Ms. Hassabi, other choreographers like David Neumann could give the festival a more diverse, experimental scope.

Tere O'Connor, an established choreographer whose company performed at Altogether Different in 1996, would like to see the festival return to being a showcase for the young and unproven. "It would certainly be a good time to take another look at what the festival could offer," he said. "How it could remain a barometer of what's actually happening that's different."

Guy Yarden, a composer and arts administrator who has worked for Dance Theater Workshop and Movement Research, a service organization for artists founded in 1978,

## Many young, downtown choreographers feel a once-daring festival is playing it safe.

expressed little surprise at the festival's current programming. "I never thought that Altogether Different or Next Wave" —

the Brooklyn Academy's annual fall season — "were anything but marketing tools," he said. "It's unfortunate that a lot of people in the community, especially artists, think that because theaters have these programs they're nurturing innovative work. A place like the Joyce doesn't pretend to be anything else than exactly what it is — a very middle-of-the-road presenting institution. It gives \$50,000 a year for commissions — in a budget of \$5 million, that's 1 percent. They are not in the business of nurturing creation. They're in the business of selling and marketing."

Mr. Wechsler said that choreographers participating in Altogether Different had been asked to present one New York premiere. Each artist receives \$5,000. "In Altogether Different we package companies as a way of introducing them to the Joyce audience," he said. "It does help to introduce some artists to audience members who may not be familiar with them."

The festival's publicity campaign, however, has also been the subject of some derision. The sexy, out-of-focus photographs of the five choreographers were a departure from the zany group shots of previous years that seemed to say: "Look at us! Dance is fun!" Instead they hinted at slick soft porn. "The marketing looks quite polished, like it is trying to get people there," Mr. O'Connor said. "It doesn't seem artist-selected."

Unfortunately, young choreographers see little reason to be optimistic about the producing side of avant-garde dance. For them, the recent resignation of Mark Russell, the executive director of P.S. 122 who was widely known for his risk-taking, is devastating. But Mr. Yarden doesn't think that type of foresight is irreplaceable. "It takes one person to change things," he said. "People are always talking about vision, right? It's an often-used word by executive directors, and I've always hated it. What change requires is one executive director working for a large institution to take the reins and say, 'We need to step back, look at what we're doing and change it.' I think we need to stop having vision, see what's in front of us and take some risks." □

## LETTERS

### ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT

#### Feeding Hand Bitten

To the Editor:

It would have been interesting to learn, from even one of the critics of the Joyce Theater's Altogether Different program quoted by Gia Kourlas ["When Altogether Different Becomes Same Old," Feb. 15], what companies they think should have been invited to be part of this year's program. Instead, what we get from Maria Hassabi is sour grapes. And what we get from Keely Garfield is a classic example of biting the hand that fed you: she was chosen to participate, she was unable to convert that exposure into additional bookings, and she blames the Joyce, not herself, for that failure. "There really should be a commitment on the part of presenters to nurture artists," Ms. Garfield says — as if presenting companies not ready to present themselves were not, in itself, a commitment to nurturing.

How long do you hold an artist's hand? The Joyce must confront that dilemma every time it assembles another Altogether Different program. If the theater errs on the side

of caution, it is castigated for a lack of imagination; if it picks relatively untested artists, they may well fail to exploit the opportunity they have been given, and the nurturing comes to naught.

Damning the Joyce with the faintest of praise, Guy Yarden declares that New York's premier venue for smaller dance companies is "a very middle-of-the-road presenting institution." I would say that the Joyce is every bit as daring as a fiscally responsible institution can afford to be, at a time when even well-known companies have trouble selling out the theater.

At best, Altogether Different can showcase only half a dozen companies each year, so scores of choreographers are left out of the festival for every one that is included. This cruel arithmetic is bound to lead to carping, and Ms. Kourlas has found her share of dissenters. But it has also jump-started the careers of any number of important artists. It would have been nice to hear from some of them.

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