

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

LIFE AND ARTS

International dance fest is growing by leaps and bounds

BY R.M. CAMPBELL
P-I dance critic

Seattle's Phffft Dance Theater is among the companies taking part this weekend in "Beyond the Threshold."



CHARLIE SCHUEER

COMING UP

BEYOND THE THRESHOLD INTERNATIONAL DANCE FESTIVAL

WHEN/WHERE: 8 tonight and 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Broadway Performance Hall, 1625 Broadway; also ongoing performances 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Center House, Seattle Center

TICKETS: Broadway Performance Hall, \$17-\$20, with various discounts, 800-838-3006 or brownpapertickets.com; free admission to Center House events

No one could accuse Cyrus Khambatta of lacking ambition. The founding artistic director of Phffft Dance Theater — first in New York, then in Seattle — has organized an international dance festival comprising nearly 100 artists that opens tonight at the Broadway Performance Hall, spills over into the Center House Saturday and Sunday, then returns to Capitol Hill for the final performance Sunday night.

This is the third year for the ever-expanding festival sponsored by Phffft. The idea was conceived when Khambatta moved from New York to Seattle seven years ago and re-established his dance company.

"When I moved here," he said, "I reflected I was 3,000 miles from the East Coast and even farther from Europe, where I had done a lot of work and had a lot of connections, in addition to those in Latin America. My impression then was that the city was geographically isolated from other cultural centers but had a particular ambience for the creation of art — a kind of incubator. I wanted to reconnect with my own background, my own international experience and create a larger picture.

"That was the intent behind the festival. What was unique about Seattle was the strong local culture and pride about it. I wanted to connect those two."

His own background couples being raised in Arlington, Va., and his father's Parsi heritage. He is a Zoroastrian, a descendent of Persian refugees who fled their native country for India in the seventh and eighth centuries to escape religious persecution by conquering Arabs.

Last year his company was joined by small ensembles in Portland, Washington, D.C., and Mexico. This year the offerings have been expanded

to a whole range of groups and individuals from Canada, India, Italy, Spain, Ecuador, Brazil and Palestine, among others, as well as Phffft and Spectrum Dance Theater of Seattle.

Many of the choreographers and dancers in the festival Khambatta met either in the Northwest, like Delia Brett of Machine Noisy Dance Society, based in Vancouver, B.C., or Johan Forsman and Lea Martini of Sweden.

While Friday and Sunday night's program is more conventional in that it is presented on a proscenium stage, the weekend performances at Center House are not. They are site specific.

About 1 ½ years ago, Khambatta said, he talked with Seattle Center officials about a partnership. All sorts of ideas were tossed about, discussing what part of the complex would be most suitable for dance. Eventually they agreed the whole space would be the best option. Artists selected the part of the building they wanted and then created a chronology of performances for 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

A section of the old Berlin Wall, about 3 1/2 feet high and wide, was discovered in the building. "That became a kind of metaphor for us to look at different kinds of boundaries," said Khambatta, referring to culture and language in addition to concrete and guns.

Mark Haim, with Koushik Ghosh from India, Alice Gosti from Italy and Jim Kent, who moved to Seattle from New York, are doing a piece created in Nagoya, Japan, titled "KURONOZ." It has been done all over the world, said Khambatta, with the same costumes.

Another piece, from Canada, uses a cage that fills with crumbled paper throughout the day with the dancer inside. It is about "information overload and what keeps us from each other."