



PRESS REVIEWS

The New York Times

It's a Jungle Out There, So Hang On For Dear Life

by Jack Anderson

The Phfff! Troupe covers life, love and the workplace

Modern Barbarism was startling from beginning to end. Choreographed and performed by Cyrus Khambatta and Rob Kitsos of The Phfff! Dance Theatre Company, it depicted a brutal struggle between two competitive office workers. It was a duet so extravagant and gleefully malicious that one took an almost guilty pleasure in beholding such unrestrained evil.

The Washington Post

by Pamela Squires

Vacuous American niceness and out-of-control consumerism were the themes of the New York-based Phfff! Dance Theatre Company's 55-minute "Smile America," which premiered Saturday at Dance Place.

The troupe, founded in 1985, has an idiosyncratic style that combines a tatty look with slick technical proficiency, and a high-energy, contact-intense movement style with a high-brow concern for social issues.

Performed in collaboration with cellist Michelle Kinney, "Smile America" was conceived, choreographed and danced by Jenn Paislee Clark, Gayle Gibbons and Artistic Director Cyrus Khambatta.

It opened with a tap dance in tennis shoes and proceeded in a series of mini-sequences of varying lengths that grouped to form four large scenes. Long sections of pure movement alternated with such theatrical setups as a dancer hanging from strings like a puppet. Dotting the work were spoken phrases, such as "I have no personality, but I have great teeth," that served to refocus attention on the

theme of superficiality. The mini-sequences concluded with silences and black-outs, so the work appeared to constantly disappear and then take up again.

There was no climax or denouement, just a flow clever choreographic material that proceeded in fits and starts. In the final scene, done to the sound of children laughing and glass breaking, the dancers fled as clumps of consumer items - bird baths, boxes of Pampers and Gatorade bottles - inundated the stage and almost did them in...

The theme was best plied when the thematic subtext obliquely informed behavior, as in Khambatta's nonsense-syllable monologue, which sounded like Goofy delivering an inaugural address.

"Smile America's" real success was kinesthetic. In almost constant contact with one another, dancers flew, pulled and drew on each others energy. In the end, it was the sheer physicality of the dancing that won the evening.