

# Dance for Life 2015: laughs, tears and dance



Laura Molzahn

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Dance for Life 2015: Laughing, crying, dancing at a dynamite benefit.

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**W**e laughed, we cried. We laughed again, whenever emcees Joey Bland and Tim Mason came back onstage, cracking wise or introducing projected videos of themselves "auditioning" or taking orders from evil genius/Hubbard Street artistic director Glenn Edgerton, channeling Ian Fleming's James Bond villain Blofeld.

Second City's Bland and Mason were a genius move: witty outsiders who validated the appeal of dance at the dynamite 24th annual Dance for Life, Saturday at the Auditorium. In fact, ingenuity — balance, variety — and very fine dancing marked the entire benefit program, founded to help support HIV/AIDS outreach.

A sense of Chicago dance history and community also bound the evening together. Gerald Arpino's crisp, courtly 1965 "Viva Vivaldi!" was the Joffrey's amuse-bouche, showcasing the dynamic Edson Barbosa and Elivelton Tomazi in the male solos. Same Planet Different World reprised its 2009 DFL debut with another performance of Danial Shapiro and Joanie Smith's 1989 "To Have and to Hold," a sextet soft as a pillow fight but packing an emotional wallop.

Other pieces, though new or newish, exerted a powerful retro tug. Giordano Dance pulled out all the stops on Ray Leeper's 2014 "Feelin' Good Sweet," a Fosse throwback set mostly to "Get Happy" renditions and utterly shameless in its supercharged sexy dancing.

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C5's premiere on five giant swings, "Garland Suite," channeled Judy Garland and her heyday, the women in shimmering gowns, the men in white tie and tails gliding or flying over the stage; minor mishaps just added to its playful air. Lighthearted but serene, "Garland Suite" provided a

transition between the mostly comic first half and more somber second.

Early on, Hubbard Street hit both sides of the equation with excerpts from its 2014 Second City collaboration, "The Art of Falling." Though not generally airborne, Alejandro Cerrudo's poignant piece for five couples, "Second to Last," rivaled "Garland Suite" for seamless gliding while channeling Plato. Robyn Mineko Williams' hilarious duet for one lonely man and a blowup doll, "Wicked at Heart," proved the evening's high-water mark for comedy.

Reprising Lane Alexander and Bril Barrett's 2013 a cappella "In the Beginning," Chicago Human Rhythm Project brought the fun, enhanced by individual performers' improvisations. Most fun: loose-limbed redhead Ian Berg.

In the second half, River North's excerpts from Frank Chaves' 2014 piece for six men, "In the End," stopped the heart, especially in light of Chaves' recently announced departure. The sense of loss was overwhelming.

In the finale, a reprise of the 2011 "Stand By Me," Randy Duncan managed, as usual, to combine pathos and celebration. It was dedicated to the memory of dancer-choreographer Paul Christiano — an outcast like so many former AIDS sufferers — who tried and tried until he could try no more.

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