

# High and mighty

In praise of Project Bandaloop's soaring *Loft!*

**By Rita Felciano**  
**SF Bay Guardian**

**PROJECT BANDALOOOP HAS** come a long way since the early days, when it was trying to find a place for itself in that awkward space between the climbing wall and the theater stage. But founder and artistic director Amelia Rudolph kept at it, developing choreographic skills and training a group of performers with dance in their genes. If you are looking for nontraditional holiday entertainment, hie thee over to the Project Artaud Theater this weekend. There is no more joyous, festive, or entertaining show in town.

*Loft! An Evening of Selected Works* starts outside, moves into the lobby, and then proceeds into the theater proper only to reverse the trajectory. Considering this somewhat cumbersome structure, the program transitioned smoothly. Pauses were held to a minimum, and people actually seemed to enjoy chatting between numbers and not having their butts stuck to the seats all evening long. With 10 pieces – all of them created by Rudolph in the past three years – variety ruled. Narratives – some clear, some ambiguous – gave way to pure movement; humor gave way to tenderness, stillness to explosiveness. Many of the pieces were quite short and probably could be more developed.

The program opened with three flying muses (Rudolph, Anje Marshall, and Kimm E. Ward) bestowing their poetic blessings on the crowd below. In the dark the three climbers looked like frogs leaping up the theater's facade, but as soon as the lights hit and the Golan Project's infectious musical strains started, they unfolded wings. Rather, they must have been wings – how else could these airborne creatures float in space, or swoop and dive and hang on by their toes and flip each other in the process?

Two pieces, both of them evoking the everyday in a nicely detailed manner, took place on a bed attached, vertically, high up the lobby wall (slippers and night table included). In the more subtle of the two (because it so clearly evoked stages of sleep), Ward's nighttime reading sent her into sweet dreams and crunchy nightmares. Later on, Heather Baer and Mark Stuver's conjugal relationship

careened between squabbling and playing, cuddling and kicking. If you've ever fought with your partner over a comforter, you'll recognize the scene. For me, the excerpts from Stravinsky's *Apollon Musagete*, however, were problematic (it's too well established in my ears as the score for Balanchine's *Apollo*).

With its implied sense of space, *Edge* was the evening's most earthbound work. Jack Carpenter's lighting design (excellent throughout) suggested a chasm into which the ensemble repeatedly peered, coming away with reactions both intrigued and repulsed. Since several of these dancers also climb cliffs, one could imagine real experiences having given rise to this edgy *Edge*. More than anything the dance evoked a turbulent sea, with the roiling dancers a mass of conflicting emotions. Clinging to each other, they split into smaller units only to find themselves being thrown together again.

*Bach Wall* (set to selections from Bach) played with ballet structure by setting off soloists against a supporting corps. Lovely and serene, the dancers on the climbing wall created the context for the duets on the floor: first Rachael Lincoln and Melecio Estrella, voluptuous with slow lifts and flips, then Rudolph and Estrella. The reclining dancers, dressed in white jumpsuits, glowed with the softness of a pastoral idyll as they watched their companions on the wall. Handsome newcomer Alexander Zendzian looked particularly elegant. In traditional ballet, he could play a prince.

Three contrasting duets explored relationships through different types of aerial dance. The amusing *Men's Duet* (with Estrella and Mark Stuver) took on male bantering with flips and lifts and quick changes of direction. Competitive, physical, and lighthearted, the piece's mix of interlocking arms and pointing fingers rolled along swiftly, lasting just the right length. In *Tango Waltz*, Stuver relaxed in midair while Lincoln approached him from below. This became quite literally an up-and-down, on-and-off relationship. Yanking, dragging, and swinging, the two partners gave each other a workout that soared but also landed hard.

The marvelously versatile Lincoln returned, partnering Estrella to form the main couple in the volatile but beautiful *Inverted Duets*. Rudolph took *Tango's* sultry abruptness and interlocking bodies and translated them into aerial dances. Partners pulled each other not only sideways but also upside down; they embraced and moved away when not flipping each other or spinning around their own axis.

A bonus pleasure was watching these dancers' responses to the music. It helped that Rudolph chose so well from such a broad palette. Even the cuts made to the classics were acceptable. In addition to the works already mentioned, and tango and Latin commissions by Raymond Granlund and Zachary Carretin, the score included Prokofiev. Not bad, not bad.

**Project Bandaloop performs Thurs/15-Sat/17, 8p.m.,  
Project Artaud Theater, 450 Florida, SF. \$22.50-\$25.  
(415) 392-4400, <http://www.projectbandaloop.org>**