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Spontaneity, creativity dance across stage at AURA's season finale

Think outside the box.

That's the theme of the University of Houston's Moores School of Music's (MSM) AURA contemporary ensemble, which collaborated with the Sandra Organ Dance Company for its final performance of the semester.

The pair brought that theme to life in its third annual showcase April 12 in the Moores Opera House.



Photo courtesy of Rob Smith, conductor,
AURA contemporary ensemble

Trio: Sandra Organ, Yolanda Gibbs and Mireya Gamez take the stage while Melisa Rose and Bernardo Scarambone rehearse their music in the background.

MSM faculty members and flutists Sydney Carlson and K Clark shined as they performed "Ecstatic Dances" during of the evening's two traditional ballet numbers. Equally pleasurable was the break away from most ballets, where precision and perfection are a requirement. Instead, the dancers relied on modern choreography that allowed them to be fluid in their moves. The game of leapfrog performed by David Armendariz, Mireya Gamez and Yolanda Gibbs during "Remember" was a perfect example of the laid-back essence of this type of dancing.

Equally beautiful in its simplicity was the musical performance of violinist Courtney Keeper and pianist Bernardo Scarambone. Setting the tone for "Poetry Arrived," the duo's soft melodies carried throughout the auditorium.

Moods elevated again with Valerie Vidal's strong presence on the alto saxophone during "Elements." The dancing trio comprised of Marcelo de Sa Martins, Patrick Willison and David Armendariz did not falter either as they left the audience energized just before intermission.

The second half of the evening continued to showcase singing, dancing and music. Perhaps one of the most memorable performances was "Lament," in which Sandra Organ joined Mireya Gamez and Yolanda Gibbs onstage. Although many audience members couldn't help but focus on Organ's effortless

moves, the company's namesake allowed her students to shine. Each had her own solo within the number, highlighting her individual abilities as a dancer.

Cellist Melisa Rose and pianist Scarambone also delivered impeccable performances during this number.

A perfect end to an extraordinary evening of music and dance, the ensemble performance of "Celestial Music" beautifully culminated hours of practice and perfection. Led by conductor Rob Smith, the orchestra's music created an atmosphere complete with the spontaneity and spirit.

AURA will open next season with "Einstein on Mercer Street," featuring Timothy Jones, associate professor of voice, and guest composer Kevin Puts, Sept. 27.

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