

# 'Surrender, Dorothy!' at Highways Performance Space

BY VICTORIA LOOSELEAF

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Celebrating three decades of making dance in Los Angeles, postmodern master Rudy Perez, who recently turned 79, refuses to rest on his laurels. One of the co-founders of New York's experimental Judson Dance Theatre, a coterie of artists who would define boundary-breaking "downtown" aesthetics in 1962, Perez continues to chart an unwavering course where pedestrian moves transcend the mundane to reveal bold, deep ideas.

Proof is visible in Perez's latest work, "Surrender, Dorothy!," seen over the weekend at Highways Performance Space. At 45 minutes, this is a work in progress (it bows next year in its entirety), and though it's got some ragged edges, attention must still be paid. Featuring original music by Steve Moshier, including settings of several Dorothy Parker poems, "Surrender" was accompanied by the composer's formidable Liquid Skin Ensemble.

Perez inspires a rabid loyalty, and most of the six dancers have performed with him for years. Indeed, his style is in their bones, and as the musicians began a throbbing, minimalist beat, such basic acts as walking, sitting and standing held fascination. Straight musical interludes -- sans

dance -- with arpeggiated keyboards, a plaintive sax and pulsing bass lines underscored guest soprano Linda Brown's warblings. But Parker's moody lyrics ("I'd like to rip the hearts of men in half") needed the boost movement can provide.

Happily, when songs ended, dancers returned: A statuesque Anne Grimaldo jumping in place made the heart soar; Sarah Swenson assayed a squatting Groucho Marx-like walk.

Humor also punctuated Grimaldo's duet with her much shorter husband, Jeff Grimaldo, who, while cavalierly lifting her, seemed to offer sublime hope.

Isolation coursed through the work as well, with Jamie Benson's angled stances and arm-flings a plea for connection; Swenson, backed against a starkly lighted wall, proved another discomfiting figure. But wit won out, and Perez's reconstruction of 1963's "Take Your Alligator With You" concluded the piece on a high, with Stefan Fabry and Tamsin Carlson in "Funny Face" mode. Striking whimsical poses -- cigarette-puffing, shadow-boxing and faux fox-trotting -- the pair, looking "Mad Men" chic (he in skinny tie and jacket, she in pencil-thin skirt), were both thoroughly retro yet totally today.

This is the key to Perez's longevity -- and gifts. Innately understanding how to maneuver bodies through space, he turns the known world into the connective tissue of art.

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