

Program displays Barton's quirkiness

By **Steve Sucato** | October 13, 2011

Whatever mechanism inside us that warns against the embarrassment of acting out in overtly strange ways, Canadian choreographer Aszure Barton's is switched off.

In the University at Buffalo Center for the Arts on Wednesday night, she and her company, Aszure Barton & Artists, let flow wave after wave of idiosyncratic movement that vacillated from elegantly graceful to stylized clowning and the outright bizarre.

UB audiences may recall Barton as one of the featured choreographers for Mikhail Baryshnikov's *Hell's Kitchen Dance*, which premiered in UB's Center for the Arts in 2006. Since then she has garnered a reputation for the brilliantly unusual in her works.

The program opened with Barton's "Blue Soup," a collection of excerpts from past works melded together to create a new one.

Six dancers, costumed in turquoise men's suits, stood at the rear of the stage in silhouette with their backs to the audience as dancer Andrew Murdoch (similarly dressed) in a solo at the front of the stage mirrored in movement the animated musicality of the song he performed to. After the others joined him in an equally quirky group dance, Barton took center stage for a solo of her own, demonstrating the unique movement language of hers that seems to adopt whatever movement reactions that come to mind while listening to a piece of music.

For the rest of the work, her madcap dancers lip-synced to songs, interjected odd hitches in their dance steps, slouched, crept, let out random screams and at times, as if suddenly tripping over their sanity, calmed momentarily to perform sleek and technically proficient movement phrases.

While on the surface Barton's choreography can seem somewhat off-the-cuff, there is masterful structure to it. What appears to be dancers fidgeting is transformed in moments into unencumbered beauty in motion.

The program's second work, "Busk," took a more moody and reflective tone than the first. The work, which premiered at the 2009 Ringling International Arts Festival, appeared inspired by the circus arts and street performers. A root word of the Spanish word "Buscar" meaning "to seek," "Busk" was filled with a collection of melancholy and sometimes agitated performers seeking the attention of an audience that, if it had not abandoned them completely, was no longer interested in their acts.

Set to a moving violin score by Ljova and the Kontraband, "Busk," like "Blue Soup," featured the random uniqueness of Barton's movement language, only this time with a more focused emotional intent.

Part Cirque du Soleil, part mime, Busk's characters, costumed like monks, were imbued with one of the most intense of human frailties: the need to be wanted.

While perhaps not an emotionally riveting dance work, "Busk" was nonetheless captivating as were the performances of its dancers in it and throughout the entire program.