

Barton's dance artistry is stunning

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By Calvin Wilson –

Aszure Barton & Artists, the New York-based dance company that performed Saturday evening at the Blanche M. Touhill Performing Arts Center, had no problem living up to its lofty reputation. Presented by Dance St. Louis, the ensemble performed two pieces — "Busk" and "Blue Soup" — that were as vivid as they were breathtaking. The performance attracted 650 people.

Dancer-choreographer Barton has a richly theatrical sensibility that takes full advantage of the possibilities inherent in movement, music, lighting and space. Throughout the evening, she created stage pictures that confirmed her status as a peer to such esteemed choreographers as Karole Armitage, Bill T. Jones and Mark Morris.

"Busk" was bursting with striking imagery and evocative atmosphere. At one point, hooded dancers clustered together, suggesting a gathering of monks or blackbirds. At another, what appeared to be a garbage bag with legs turned out to be a crouching dancer who gradually stood up as the bag fell away. The dance also made room for offbeat but engaging humor, including a moment when — out of nowhere — the performers sang "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah."

"Blue Soup," a sampling of various Barton works, was lighter in mood than "Busk" but no less energetic. Particularly effective was an exuberant number set to Paul Simon's "Pigs, Sheep and Wolves." Also impressive was a segment in which the dancers appeared in silhouette to the accompaniment of chattering voices.

At 34, Barton — a protégé of dance legend Mikhail Baryshnikov — demonstrates a confident mastery of her art form. Her choreography is at once precise and emotionally involving, and her musical choices are consistently apt and compelling. But Barton's greatest asset is her sheer creativity — as when, in "Busk," a dancer performed to the contrasting sound of dance steps.

Unquestionably, the concert was a treat for dance fans. But you don't have to be an aficionado to appreciate Barton's artistry. It's truly a thing of beauty.