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Review: A Dance Heginbotham Deserving of the Hype

By Siobhan Burke

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From left, Sarah Stanley, Courtney Lopes, Kristen Foote, Macy Sullivan and Weaver Rhodes performing at Brookfield Place. Credit Richard Perry/The New York Times

The work of John Heginbotham takes some getting used to, or maybe it has just taken time to come into its own. Since founding his troupe, [Dance Heginbotham](#), in 2011, the Mark Morris Dance Group alum has received a steady stream of commissions and accolades, some of which seemed premature. But on Friday at Brookfield Place, where he offered a free program presented by Arts Brookfield and the [River to River Festival](#), the company looked — and sounded — entirely deserving of the hype.

Initially billed as a site-specific event that would rove around the retail areas of Brookfield Place in Lower Manhattan, the program wound up sticking to a more traditional format, performed (mostly) onstage in the complex's spacious Winter Garden. Live music and evening sunlight accompanied the three pieces, which included “Angels’ Share” (2014) and two premieres.

Mr. Heginbotham’s choreography, at first sight, may seem derivative of Mr. Morris’s — buoyantly musical, courteous with hints of mischief — but in “Angels’

Share,” his own more bizarre sense of humor soon made itself known. Of his eight excellent dancers, Lindsey Jones has the sharpest knack for his style of deadpan, which requires keeping a straight face as fanciful, ridiculous moves swoop in from out of left field.

In the new “Villa,” set to music by the Brazilian composer [Heitor Villa-Lobos](#), one such move involves a heel swivel that sends a tiny shudder through the whole body, followed by a sideways head bob. The work’s five women, joined by Jordan Dodson on guitar, perform this in almost militaristic unison, achieving a delicate serious-silly balance. Their expressions, though subdued, aren’t blank, suggesting plans being hatched or emotions slyly stowed away, just beneath the surface.

The Winter Garden stage poses some challenges; without real wings, it exposes the dancers when they’re not dancing, revealing preparations for what should be unexpected entrances. But Mr. Heginbotham also used the space to his advantage, notably in “The Fandango,” danced by the full company to Boccherini’s Fandango from Guitar Quintet in D.

Buttressing the ensemble of five musicians, a chorus of castanet players appeared in the two main aisles, stretching back through the audience, with one leader onstage. As the dancers strutted like flamingos and twitched their shoulders to the resounding percussion, their costumes — black collared shirts tucked into spandex briefs — captured something essential about them and about Mr. Heginbotham in general, at once vulnerable and buttoned-up.