

Houston Chronicle  
Dance: Walsh goes on a limb  
By Molly Glentzer  
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Gabriella Nissen Photography  
Felicia McBride and Dominic Walsh performed with compelling intensity in Dominic Walsh Dance Theater's company premiere of a duet from Jiri Kylian's stark, psychologically-driven 27'52".

This is a story about arms and the man. The man being the much-lauded choreographer Jiri Kylian, and the arms he most likely originated being the twitchy, articulated limbs that are now nearly as ubiquitous as classical ballet's port de bras.

Often happening while bodies are otherwise still, these arms are the legs, so to speak, of the movement; they jerk, jab and fret like the feet of Balanchine dancers.

They are everywhere in [Dominic Walsh Dance Theater's First Course](#) program — in a stunning duet adapted from Kylian's stark 27'52" and in Walsh's *Medea* and *Terminus*, both of which read like odes to the Czech master.

It's a coup for DWDT to add even a piece of 27'52" to its rep. In the U.S., only Hubbard Street Dance Chicago owns the entire dance, created for Netherlands Dance Theater II in 2002. The name refers to its 27-minute, 52-second length.

DWDT's version of the big duet, created for a gala, bristles with suspense, enhanced by Kees Tjebbes' moody lighting. Set to a quietly percussive section of Dirk Haubrich's score, with parts spoken in French and German, it seems to be about primal urges, a struggle for control and perhaps death. At the end, the dancers lie under a large strip of marley - soft vinyl flooring common in dance studios - which made me think of earth piled on graves.

Thursday, Felicia McBride (topless for much of the dance) and Walsh gave it good tension. She danced with angry vulnerability to his strong power-play, and they handled Kylian's tough, inventive partnering as if they'd done it for years. Those jagged arms, in this piece, add a sense of desperate urgency, offset by moments when they're outstretched and solid as steel.

That kind of contrast might have helped *Medea*, which felt like an excerpt but wasn't. Walsh's program notes suggest he's exploring the title character "as a demi-god, woman and mother" through three dancers, but I couldn't tell who was who.

McBride, Rachel Meyer and Marissa Leigh Gomer, their hair braided underneath big headbands, gave it everything they could. In addition to arms, Walsh loves a finely-extended leg, a beautiful turnout and exquisitely arched feet; all of which this trio of ballerinas has in abundance. He also loves sinewy spines, and his frequent use of them makes for some amazingly ripped abs. Walsh has steadily demanded more of his dancers over the years, and the current crop has the sleek vibe of a top European dance company.

***Terminus*, one of Walsh's best-conceived pieces, shows the power of collaboration. His partners are the expressive string ensemble [Two Star Symphony](#) and artist [Nicola Parente](#), whose lush abstract paintings and urban video (on an installation that chops up the images) give context to the movement.**

Walsh plays effectively with music visualization. Quirky, plucky moments in the score stand out with equally cheeky quivering legs and feet.

The arm business gets a little silly when a dancer seems to be led by her outstretched index finger, which is apparently possessed by some alien virus that spreads into the hand, goes all creepy-crawly over her face, then infects a leg. A slow-motion sequence to repetitive strings goes on too long. But those quibbles dissipate when the music turns gypsy-folkish, and the dancers bounce in with sour-faced humor.

Randolph Ward, deftly and gently riffing on Mr. Bojangles in one of the first section's solos, got the most biting laughs. Domenico Luciano and Meyer were strong and sensuous in the final duet, which brings the painting motif full circle. They have blue paint on their hands, and as they touch each other during their partnering, each body becomes a moving canvas.

For that idea, I put my arms to clapping.