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Mixing Brazilian flair with Midwestern values

By **MOLLY GLENTZER**
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Armando Duarte, a Brazilian who teaches at the University of Iowa, brought his year-old contemporary dance company to town Saturday. Duarte has staged pieces for the Sandra Organ Dance Company, but this show at the Kaplan Theater was the first evening-length glimpse of his work.

Could one identify Duarte's sensibility as Brazilian if it weren't for his music choices and the Portuguese titles of some of his dances? Perhaps. There's an edge in his occasional gestures, sexiness in his use of the hips and dramatic flair in his ensemble work. Duarte is also irrepressibly romantic. It's a good combination, although his ballet-based vocabulary is limited. In this show, he relied a lot on the same steps — a wide-open 'X' stance and a leg in side attitude — to build long body lines. Structurally simple, the dances often were saved by their quirky, punctuated moves.

Duarte Dance Works' nine strong dancers were all Univer-

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sity of Iowa dance graduates or masters degree candidates, and they have a Midwestern freshness about them. The company also includes Houston-based Alessandra Herszkowicz, a native Brazilian who can carry off moments of high melodrama, Nicole Wong and Marina Fukushima. Houston Ballet's Leticia Oliveira and Fernando Moraga (who are from Brazil and Chile, respectively) were standouts as guest artists.

The highlights were the big-scale *Baque* and *Noir*. *Baque*, in Portuguese, refers to a physical slap or a mental one, like the stun of sudden news. The dance was mysteriously ritualistic, built on rhythmic contemporary Brazilian music. A single male (Daniel Stark, an imposing figure) was surrounded by a fierce harem. They seemed to be protecting some secret as they made "shhh" gestures. A middle section of the dance had "Cleopatra arms" drawn from Arabic origins. Ingenious wiggles borrowed from Indian bharata natyam were lay-

ered onto balancing steps. Later, Brazilian-based folk steps found their way into the mix, hips swirled more openly and the mood was joyful. The costumes were lovely — split skirts and loose cropped tops in gold and eggplant tones.

Excerpts from *Noir*'s similar movements were set to Sergei Rachmaninov's surging *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*. There was a special moment when Herszkowicz walked toward something unseen as the rest of the ensemble, in a straight line facing the audience, receded with sharp steps. The dancers wore elegant floor-length black velvet skirts over short unitards with velvet trim. In one section, they leapt inexplicably onto the stage without the skirts. Oliveira and Moraga seemed important as a central couple in the beginning, but melted into the crowd.

Their bravura talents weren't tapped deeply enough in *Circles*, a contemporary ballet duet with Oliveira *en pointe*. But they breathed life, charm and pathos into *Intermezzo*, a three-part dance Duarte expanded from his 1994 *Taste of an Orange*, which is also in Organ's repertory. In the original *Section I*, a man peel-

ing an orange is interrupted by a lively girl. She leaves him (a new touch), and in *Section II* he pines for her, oblivious to a stageful of other women. *Section III*, a premiere, brought the girl back, bearing a watermelon gift — perhaps to suggest that life is bigger and juicier than oranges.

Two other premieres offered a range of moods. *La Luna y el Sur*, set to music by Simon Diaz, Astor Piazzolla and Fernando Solanas, was a dreamy but intense duet full of arching and reaching motions for Herszkowicz and Stark. Marina Fukushima was engaging as a child shaking with laughter in *Infancia*, about the playfulness of children. The other five dancers might have been her real or imaginary friends.

Nicole Wong performed admirably in an emotive solo, *Lay of Errantry*, despite a pretentious and unintelligible score that mixed poetry by Aime Cesaire with operatic music.