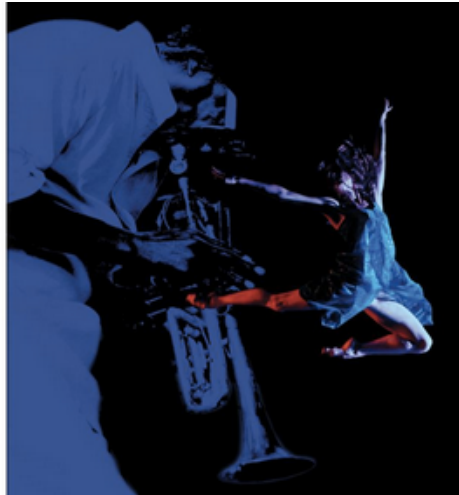




home > arts

Theatre review: Xclaim Dance Company's "Blue" finds inspiration in Miles Davis



By **Jay Weitz**

From the November 13, 2014 edition

Fifty-five years ago, Columbia Records released "Kind of Blue," among the most influential jazz albums ever recorded, and a landmark for trumpeter Miles Davis and his band (alto saxophonist Cannonball Adderley, tenor saxophonist John Coltrane, pianists Bill Evans and Wynton Kelly, bassist Paul Chambers, and drummer Jimmy Cobb).

That influence now extends to Columbus' Xclaim Dance Company, led by choreographer Mariah Layne French, and to her collaborator, filmmaker Terry Wilson. "The Miles Davis Project" is Act 1 of the evening-length "Blue," receiving its premiere at the Columbus Dance Theatre's Fisher Theatre. Each of the five tracks on "Kind of Blue" is represented in dance, with Wilson's film montages of Xclaim dancers, set mostly to snippets from Davis' 1969 "In a Silent Way" introducing them.

French's "So What" opens in silhouette, flips jazz hands in all directions, and often sets a moving group in front of a vamping set of background dancers. "Freddie Freeloader" is a French tap showcase, while Deena Schmidt's "Blue in Green" cascades with canons. In "All Blues," soloist J. Shannon Filmore slowly warms up to the tune, flicking his hands and snapping his fingers, channeling the cool of Miles himself. Laura Schoessler's "Flamenco Sketches" is the most quietly balletic of the pieces.

Act 2, "Rhythms & Tones," leaves Miles behind. The Filmore and French "Blue Like Jazz" features quick walks, sudden stops and changes in direction. The central section of the three-part "Oceans & Sky" by Caroline Bramlage, Kelsey Keller and Schoessler, finds aerialists Mary Negley and Theresa Ming Young elegantly tumbling in diaphanous pouches suspended in midair. In the revival of French's 2009 "Boom Chic," the ensemble pulses to the heartbeat of the music, thrusting pelvises, chests or shoulders.

"Blue" wears the influence of Miles Davis well in this launch of Xclaim's seventh season.

Columbus Dance Theatre's
Fisher Theatre

Through Sunday, Nov. 16

592 E. Main St.,
Downtown

614-561-1635

columbusdancetheatre.com