

The New York Times

June 7, 2017

SIOBHAN BURKE | CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Scuff, Patter, Chug, Poke, Wade, Swim

Expanding the boundaries of dance, both onstage and immersed in water.

ANYONE WHO THINKS that Irish dance is a necessarily rigid form, defined by a stiff upper body and dancers moving in militaristic unison, should spend some time watching Colin Dunne. New Yorkers had the chance to do so when the singular Mr. Dunne, who has long moved past his flashier days as a star of "Riverdance," appeared on the small, no-frills stage of Irish Arts Center last weekend with the fiddler Tola Custy, the harpist Maeve Gilchrist and the piper David Power.

In their collaborative concert, "Edges of Light," Mr. Dunne's percussive dancing — performed both in the footwear known as hard shoes and, more adventurously, barefoot — functions as a fourth musician, his feet doing the work of a drummer as they scuff, patter, chug, poke and swipe at the floor. Irish dance, though inherently musical, can have a rote relationship to music, as if obeying rhythmic orders. But Mr. Dunne, who joins his wildly talented colleagues for about half of the numbers in this 70-minute show, is a soulful, integral part of the band.

"Edges of Light," created last year, brings together traditional time-honored tunes ("We decided to go for the really old ones," Mr. Dunne said on Thursday) with more contemporary compositions and devices, like the sonic manipulation of his tapping into rippling echoes. The unifying theme, as the title suggests, is dawn, Irish dawn in particular, and the music evokes both the hush and the brilliance of early morning.

In one of the more unusual moments, Mr.



From left, Tola Custy, Maeve Gilchrist and Colin Dunne in "Edges of Light," at Irish Arts Center. James Estrin/The New York Times

Dunne, seated, pulls a foot toward his mouth and whistles a church bell refrain into the microphone on the sole of his shoe. Most of his experiments, though, happen while he's standing. He ushers in the work with the sound of a whisper or a gust of wind, produced through the swinging action of one foot pawing the air, before moving into more intricate territory.

After his years in the "Riverdance" spotlight, Mr. Dunne took a step back and trained in contemporary dance, making an effort to soften the severity of the Irish form, with its traditionally immobile torso, and to tone down the showmanship. The result is a nimble, slippery ease, entirely his own. As movement ricochets up through his chest, hands, hips and head, nothing is

Annie Saunders underwater in Times Square in Lars Jan's "Holoscenes," part of the World Science Festival.

forced. He moves, it seems, because he needs to.

A few blocks southeast of Irish Arts Center, in Times Square, a crowd gathered on Thursday around an elevated water tank, trying to decipher what was happening inside: a woman, fully clothed in a skirt and shawl, performing various tasks with a basket, a footstool and some loose nectarines. The water level methodically rose and fell, so that she was sometimes submerged, sometimes wading. "Is it a magic trick?" someone asked.

It wasn't, which isn't to say that Lars Jan's "Holoscenes," a meditation on climate change, specifically water-related crises, was devoid of magic. Part of the World Science Festival and on view for five hours a night on Thursday through Saturday, the installation, with performers rotating every half-hour or so, lured thousands of passers-by into its incandescent orbit. Watching people slow down and observe so intently cast its own kind of spell.

On Thursday, the day President Trump announced he would pull out of the Paris climate accord, and Friday, I watched the piece's final two sections: Lua Shayenne, the shawled woman, trying to fill her basket with fruit or sit on her stool, followed by Annie Saunders and Geoff Sobelle (the work's choreographer), who could have been a couple arguing in the kitchen or getting ready for bed, just underwater. As the sides of the tank reflected the lights of Times Square — all that electricity — the effect was melancholic yet cautiously hopeful.

Edges of Light

Performed June 1 through 3 at Irish Arts Center, Manhattan.

Holoscenes

Performed June 1 through 3 in Times Square.