

# River North Dance, camerawork shine

By Sid Smith | Special to the Tribune  
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HMS Media and public TV's intermittent, ongoing series exploring Chicago dance delivers another winner with **"Every Dancer Has a Story" (3 p.m. Sunday on WTTW-Ch. 11; \*\*\*1/2)**, a very personal glimpse of the artists of River [North Chicago](#) Dance Company.

It would be a mistake to overly praise this breezy, beguiling hour or to pronounce the topic groundbreaking. "A Chorus Line" famously took the same tack.

But "Every Dancer" boasts director Matt Hoffman's sharp, evolving skills as a dance cinematographer. Although most of the pieces here are quoted in excerpt, Hoffman has mastered the tricky, elusive art of dance photography, balancing group shots with the right amount of close-ups, capturing both choreographic design and intimacy.

These images are deepened by writer-producer Scott Silberstein's portraits of the dancers themselves, quick takes that nevertheless reveal both personality and artistic credo.

While starting in ambling fashion, threatening a series of superficial platitudes, "Every Dancer" grows, sneaks up on you and finally touches on critical insights. The dancer is practically unique among artists in signing an almost Faustian contract: Every performer risks bodily harm to produce a sublime bodily art. That's brought home painfully in a segment dealing with artistic director Frank Chaves' ordeal with a cyst on his spine. He found getting out of bed a huge struggle and couldn't escape viewing the illness as a metaphor for the spectrum of a dancer's experience.

Usually one of the sunnier personalities in the industry, Chaves tearfully discusses his battle with the company and thanks them for their love and work, which kept him going. Dancer Hanna Britson then applies Chaves' ordeal to the art as a whole. "You know that those things are ahead of you," she says of physical suffering. "I know that I'll go down and up a lot of times, because I've already gone down and up." But, "what you get out of it," she rhapsodizes. "Being in love with what you do."

Hoffman's camera slyly shifts as she speaks to shots of her rehearsing her strange, exotic, exhilarating solo from Robert Battle's "Train," instant proof of her testimony. The costs are high—but what a payoff.

Another sequence follows Lizzie MacKenzie and [Michael Gross](#) rehearsing and performing Chaves' rapturous duet "At Last" and ends with a nifty bit of editing, segueing seamlessly from performance back to the studio, traveling through time in reverse, as it were, returning to the church where the dance religion so tirelessly plants the seeds of its ecstasy. "Every Dancer" should sway true believer and skeptic alike.