

# Dance as it really is

**TV REVIEW | Documentary beautifully captures River North January 11, 2009**

**BY HEDY WEISS Dance Critic / [hweiss@suntimes.com](mailto:hweiss@suntimes.com)**

There could be no more thrilling opening salvo for the 2009 dance season in Chicago than "Every Dancer Has a Story," a new hour long television documentary about River North Chicago Dance Company airing at 3 p.m. today on WTTW-Channel 11.

A gorgeously composed mix of performance and rehearsal footage, blended with the impassioned, articulate observations of both the company's bravura dancers and its artistic director and principal choreographer, Frank Chaves -- this is one of the best dance films to arrive on television since the fabled PBS broadcasts presented decades ago under the "Dance in America" label.

Written and produced by Chicago area video master Scott Silberstein of HMS Media, and brilliantly edited by Matt Hoffman, the documentary features superb camera work (a highly specialized art when it comes to dance) as it captures extended excerpts from nine of the most varied and galvanic works in River North's repertory. It should have TV audiences racing to the box office to nab tickets for River North's live performances at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance in Millennium Park during its Valentine's Day weekend engagement Feb. 13-14. This is a terrific company that draws on the talents of a slew of high-profile choreographers. And its virtuosic performers have rarely been showcased to better effect.

Framing the documentary are a section of "Habaneras, the Music of Cuba," Chaves' grandly colorful, richly musical piece for the full ensemble. There also is stunning footage from Chaves' "Take a Seat" (a tour de force for the men of the company, who "partner" with metal folding chairs), "Underground Movements" (a haunting work that involves amazing feats of balance), "The Mourning" (a lushly sensual duet) and "At Last" (an acrobatic love duet to the Etta James hit). Choreographer Danny Ezralow's "Pulse," a slip-sliding company work, Kevin Iega Jeff's "Sky" (set against a primal forest backdrop), Lauri Stallings' "ahimsa" (with its intriguing sense of modern alienation) and Robert Battle's "Train" (a percussive powerhouse featuring Hanna Britson in a heart-pumping solo that suggests a modern day take on "Rite of Spring") are captured in all their ferocity.

The pieces are interspersed with rehearsal footage that gives a strong hint of the blood, sweat and stamina involved in getting a work to the stage. These segments will surely give audiences a whole new appreciation for this hugely demanding art form.

*River North's Harris Theatre program will include performances of "Train" and "Underground Movements," as well as three premieres: a duet by Chaves set to the singing of tenor Andrea Bocelli; a group work by Chaves set to the music of Chicago's increasingly hot Andrew Bird and French film composer Rene Aubry; and "Uhuru" ("freedom" in Swahili), a group piece by company dancer Monique Haley. Budding choreographers can go online to [www.rivernorthchicago.com](http://www.rivernorthchicago.com) and download the Afro-beat style music Haley is using. Devise your own take on the score and then upload your video to River North's YouTube Channel. The winning contribution will have a special place in the February programs.*