

River North Dance at Harris reviewed

By Sid Smith Special to the Tribune

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In 1989, four dance artists -- Mark Dow, Julie Burman Kaplan, Karen Frankel Jones and Ronna Kaye -- launched their own company, despite Chicago's reputation for failing to support troupes over the long haul.

Now the current members of what became known as the River North Chicago Dance Company - - purveyors of a silky, sensual brand of user friendly dance -- are enjoying the troupe's 20th-anniversary year, in great shape, judging from Saturday's concert at the Harris Theater. Notwithstanding a 22-minute late start partly due to a capacity crowd, they appear able to continue their rapid-fire spins, wriggle their sexy bodies and keep on dancing for years to come and maybe forever.

Artistic director Frank Chaves unveiled "Forbidden Boundaries," on a serious subject (his recovery from painful spinal surgery), with some uneven results. The second movement trio is a tad turgid, with intense, expressive Lizzie MacKenzie trapped in a Sisyphean tug of war, an image in need of development. But a feisty first movement, a lyrically intricate third one and a grand finish glisten with Chaves' stylish acrobatics, a cagey use of the arabesque and costumer Jackson Lowell's elastic-like T-shirts intrinsic to the design. Twice Chaves employs a confrontational choral line, probably more effective if used only once. But "Boundaries" combines thoughtful theme with River North's patented flash, the latter especially notable in one showy moment from red-hot Christian Denice.

Sherry Zunker effectively revises an earlier work in "Evolution of a Dream," a pop spectacle whose tricky synchronicity occasionally escaped the dancers Saturday. Meanwhile, Chaves' 2005 "Habaneras, the Music of Cuba," with rainbow-sherbet costumes from Jordan Ross, remains a lilting, luminous tribute and as satisfying as any work ever to come from a Chicagoan.