

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Jano Cohen

Connecting Amidst Chaos—PDP presents Dance Up Close

by Janna Meiring

The recent *Philadelphia Dance Projects presents Dance Up Close* featured two dance artists, [Megan Mazarick](#) and [Marion Ramírez](#), in their individual work. Two of Mazarick's sharp creations, *boundaries* and *monster*, bookended Ramírez's reflective compilation of improvisations. This setup amplified the polar experiences that can be expressed through dance, as well as each artist's response to the current state of the world.

Setting boundaries

Joy and whimsy are central to the hard-hitting realism that Mazarick brings through her work this evening. Theatre artist Jess Conda and DJ MG Vasio collaborate on the opening piece, *boundaries*, which playfully articulates the power of an individual to determine their own personal spaces, and the escalation of this power to the extremes of land-grabbing and controlled alliances.

Mazarick enters the space with a whooshing sound and a child-like grin, a fuzzy blanket cape embroidered with a gold lightning bolt dragging behind her. On the third repetition of this action, MG Vasio rides along on the back of the cape tooting on a [melodica](#). From here, in clean white suits, Mazarick and Conda embark on the very basic scheme of spacial marking. They walk, point, and draw dashes in the air with their hands. Mere presence in a space—any space—is an act of making boundaries. They verbally declare, "This space belongs to me," even as these spaces overlap and collide.

MG Vasio creates an evocative soundscape to the physical escapade. Mazarick and Conda quicken their pace as the beats and bleeps escalate, transforming into a shouting rendition of [Delta 5's](#) ode to personal space, "Can I get a taste of your ice cream? NO! Mind your own Biz-ness!" The beats seem to submerge underwater, becoming diffused and clouded, as Conda steps forward to a mic downstage center. I can't recognize the song, presented in forceful spoken-word form with a wink, but it calls to mind the confrontational and space-taking power of the artist Peaches.

Mazarick and Conda produce tons of tiny white flags on stands and line them up along the remnant arc of the basketball court floor. They dart from side to side, together and apart, indicating what each flag is doing, “This place is friends with this place.” “This place is the boss of these places.” After the flags have been ordered, re-ordered, destroyed, and almost consumed, Mazarick stops, “This is my national dance.” She rolls softly down to the floor, wheeling each leg around in the air with ease and landing quietly in a lunge, extending one arm in a grand gesture. I sense a quality of seeking solace within a world of chaos and tension.

The meeting place

In a series of improvisational vignettes, *kNots & Nests - pulse and air*, Ramírez partners with Jungwoong Kim and two musicians to explore the “smallest unit of community”—the duet.

Ramírez first pairs with Cuban percussionist Juan “Cuco” Castellanos, evoking a shared Caribbean history. Ramírez’ long shadow shoots across the space, highlighting the rawness of the architecture. She gently pumps the air with both hands raised, as if activating the periphery of potential connection. With her eyes closed and her loose curls hanging over her face, she suspends her arms overhead and moves her hips slightly with a hint of salsa or merengue as she scoots her feet, flat, along the floor. Her duet with Cuco anchors in familiarity and trust.

Korean wind instrumentalist gamin (intentional lower case) initiates sound from behind the audience with the piri, a double-reed Korean oboe. The sound is sharp yet fluid, and has a lower register than one would expect from such a tiny, thin instrument. She enters along the wall, followed by Kim, where all four overlap in the space for a moment. The mixture of Cuban percussion and Korean wind feels discordant at times, mirroring the differences of Ramírez’ shakes and jostles with Kim’s slow, smooth rotations of his body along the rough brick wall. He curves his arms outward, extending from his core and reaching with the inner capillaries of the fingers, as he rotates towards the open center of the space.

The focus then turns to the meeting of Ramírez and Kim, supported by both musicians. Their improvisation allows for each distinctive movement to enter, interact with the other, and eventually, to interweave. In the suspended moments, after the last move and before the next, in a space of pure listening, is where the duet as the smallest unit of community comes through.

To extremes

Mazarick returns with her solo *monster*, a tightly-woven time-traveling story about a princess and a monster that chases her. Mazarick traces through the movement-telling of this story multiple times: forward, backward, and with multiple additions, magnifications, and changes each turn. She flicks quickly from posturing as a creature, hips low to the ground, curling her arms down widely from a puffed-shoulder stance, to the shape of a delicate princess in danger, slightly leaning backward, eyes wide and fists raised. Through Mazarick’s body, each side of the story unfolds, until a Siri-like voice informs us that it is the princess who stole the monster’s power, and this is why it chases her. Mazarick rapidly shape-shifts, creating the effect of the princess becoming more and more grotesque, exposing her own monstrous nature. Again, Mazarick’s whimsical references deliver a heavy point, highlighting how our presumed innocence and desire to have both space and power can perpetuate imbalance.

[PDP presents *Dance Up Close*](#), Christ Church Neighborhood House, February 26 - 27.

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