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## Two stylish, moving premieres



*Parsons Dance group returns to the Annenberg Center this week. KRISTA BONURA*

**Merilyn Jackson, *For The Inquirer***

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David Parsons never disappoints. Parsons Dance opened Wednesday at Annenberg Center to a buzzing house of loyal fans. Two local premieres topped the first half, and classic 2003 crowd-pleaser *Hand Dance* slid in between - a sleight-of-hand piece in which five sets of highlighted hands, their owners shrouded in black, flit about disembodied to a Kenji Bunch composition.

I first reviewed Parsons in 1993 in Scottsdale, Ariz.; this is my seventh of the company. I always check multiple reviews just to make sure I don't repeat myself, and with Parsons that's easy, because he doesn't repeat himself - with the exception of *Caught*, his 1982 hit seen by millions. It's the strobe-light work where the dancer is constantly caught in the light in midair, walking, stag-leaping, or just standing nonchalantly *en l'air*, arms crossed. It's a de rigueur work in every concert, and here former Philadelphia dancer Steven Vaughn did the deed with sangfroid.

*Round My World* (2012) was an airy, warm dance with three couples in powder blue. It concentrated on circles made by the group, or by encircling arms around a partner. Melissa Ullom forms a circle with her body back-bending to hold her ankles while her partner holds her aloft. Elena D'Amario and Vaughn dance the second duet and Eric Bourne and Christina Ilisije the third. The dancers coil and wheel around each other in variations on the meme. By the lovely ending, the group form a hand-holding ring, half of them lying down so the circle formed tilts toward us.

Former Parsons dancer Katarzyna Skarpetowska choreographed *A Stray's Lullabye*. It had a somber atmosphere; its street clothes, especially Jason Macdonald in suspenders and tank undershirt, suggested, perhaps, the Depression era. D'Amario, in a fawn-colored jumpsuit, dances mournfully in a shadowy shaft of light, almost as if injured. Macdonald's solo was more hopeful, defiant as he nearly shadowboxed with an unseen opponent. Rain and urban traffic sounds opened onto hoarse, Tom Waits-like laments - "hard times come again no more" - performed and arranged by Kenji Bunch. The lighting, by Christopher Chambers (who also designed *Caught's* lighting), remained gloomy.

Parsons' *In the End* brought the show to a lighthearted, frolicking close with the cast in jeans and tanks. Dancing to Dave Matthews Band music, the eight in this cast rocked out, with Bourne shirtless in a star-turn solo.

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Additional performances: 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 2 p.m. Saturday. Tickets: \$22-\$55.

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