

DANCE REVIEW

# Pilobolus upstages itself

Dances are combined with short films at Annenberg Center.

By Nancy G. Heller  
 FOR THE INQUIRER

**W**earing nothing but G-strings, two men and a woman showed off their superhuman strength and chiseled physiques Thursday as they arranged themselves into a series of impossible shapes atop a small table at the Annenberg Center. The ever-changing relationships among the trio — made up of Shawn Fitzgerald Ahern, Jordan Kriston, and Mike Tyus — suggested both seduction and violence. And that was just the opening number.



**Pilobolus Dance Theater** combines collaboratively choreographed dance pieces with short films. ROBERT WHITMAN

The popular Pilobolus Dance Theater combines collaboratively choreographed dance pieces with short films that act as visual palate cleansers and give the stage crew time to set up for the next item. Ironically, this season's films — notably, "Wind," an award-winning animation by Robert Löbel — were so intriguing that they threatened to upstage the live action.

In fact, Pilobolus often upstaged itself. Take "[ESC]," a Las Vegas-style magic act created with celebrity illusionists Penn and Teller. In homage to Harry Houdini, six dancers free themselves from various seemingly escape-proof, situations. It's great fun (except for the disturbing image of Kriston, duct-taped to a chair with

a plastic bag over her head). But "[ESC]" seemed to belong to a different show. Only "The Transformation," an amusing yet disturbing shadow-vignette in which a young woman is turned into a dog, harks back to vintage Pilobolus.

"Untitled 2015" (with original music by David Van Tieghem) focuses on a single set piece: a large, freestanding door that the dancers manipulate to explore its myriad physical and psychological functions. Unfortunately, the work becomes repetitive.

So does "Sweet Purgatory," the most dancier work on the bill. Dressed in colorful unitards, the performers struggle to break out of "Rite of Spring"-like circles. But even the gorgeous sequence in which one dancer slowly arched her body backward while held in a high lift is repeated so often that it loses its power. Likewise, the high drama of the music (a chamber symphony by Shostakovich) only fitfully matches the tone of the movement.

**Additional performances:** 3 and 8 p.m. Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, 3680 Walnut St. Tickets: \$30-75. Information: 215-898-3900 or [www.annenbergcenter.org](http://www.annenbergcenter.org).

