

DANCE REVIEW

Deftly blending hip-hop and ballet

By Ellen Dunkel

INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Rubberbandance Group's *Empirical Quotient* is a blend of ballet and hip-hop, but it's a quieter piece than one might expect.

In just over an hour, six dancers dressed in subtle grays, navy blue, and dark reds perform a series of dances loosely centered on the push and pull of human interactions, set to vocals and electronica by DJ and composer Jasper Gahunia.

The evening begins as the audience arrives, with the dancers warming up on stage. As the lights go down, they huddle, forming a single unit that moves across the stage. Over and over, a dancer performs a movement and the others react and reverberate. Soon, one dancer discovers she can control the music with her movements.



Rubberbandance Group performs "Empirical Quotient" at the Annenberg Center again on Saturday. **TIM FORBES**

Another dancer performs a slow, hip-hop-infused ode to the classical ballet variation, with fluttering swanlike arms, unfurling a leg into a stylized arabesque, moving arms through positions in port de bras.

There's some humor, too. The second and third sections open with audible directions coming from the booth. Finally, a dancer breaks the fourth wall and scolds, "I can hear you from the stage!"

(If only she could have addressed the audience, as well: "That cell phone light is brighter than you know!")

In another section, a woman walks on stage just as the three men are finishing their dance, hunched over and clustered together. With a click of her tongue, she gets them to move one way, then another, then another, until one man

has had enough, saying, "Let's get out of here."

The dancers are amazingly strong, making the details beautiful to watch. One kicks another's leg, gently pushing her into a pirouette. A man does very slow, controlled handstands, backbends, walkovers, and hip-hop balances.

Rubberbandance's *Empirical Quotient* is not high-energy entertainment. But it offers many visual treats to be savored.

Rubberbandance Group will perform "Empirical Quotient" at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturday, at Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, 3680 Walnut St. Tickets: \$20 to \$50. Information: 215-893-3900, or annenbergcenter.org.

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