

## Review: Motionhouse Dance Theater

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Motionhouse performed “Scattered.” Courtesy photo.

By Jasmina Wellinghoff  
*For the Express-News*

Here in San Antonio, we don't take water for granted. With little rain, depleted lakes and watering restrictions, we are aware of the value of water. In other places, they may have the opposite problem – too much rain, accompanied by floods.

We depend on water but we sure don't control it despite our best efforts. That seems to be the message behind Motionhouse Dance Theater's piece “Scattered” which was presented April 9 at the Carver Community Cultural Center under the auspices of Arts San Antonio.

Only an hour long, “Scattered” is the brainchild of the British company's artistic director and choreographer Kevin Finnan who, in an earlier interview, said he wanted people to become aware of “this incredible life force” and he wanted to exhort them to notice it. Combining live dance with startling video and a powerful musical score, the show is certainly one that people will remember.

As the stage panorama develops, the dancers first suffer the cold and wind of the northern ice land, then move to warmer climes to experience oceans, rain, and a waterfall, quench their thirst and endure drought, explore the underwater world and, apparently, even learn about the molecular structure of water, only to return to another cold and icy place at the end.

Though the stage action and video projections work together to convey the choreographer's vision, the video part can and does become dominant frequently. But the dancers fight back valiantly with mind-boggling physical feats, executed with incredible agility and vigor.

A crucial element of the production is a large set piece consisting of a curved backdrop wall which also serves as the projection screen. Though the advance publicity emphasized the immersive quality of the show, implying that the synergy between screen and live action makes the performers look like they are actually immersed in the various waterscapes, that is not quite the case. Nevertheless, their fearless moves are impressive on their own. Individually or in various combinations, they repeatedly leap onto that wave-like wall, climb up and slide down, dive from the top, dance on it (with the help of harnesses), dangle from its edge in various configurations, passing each other on the way up or down and interacting in multiple ways. Sometimes the interaction with the projected images clicks and other times the two are obviously separate but it doesn't affect the overall impact of the presentation.

There's no dull spot in the action – and some of it is truly mesmerizing – yet, oddly, the slow-moving drought segment turns out to be the most memorable one. While the video displays a cracked earth surface, the dancers effectively turn themselves into lizard-like creatures who crawl across the stage with angular movements and lizard-like head jerks or hang off the top of the wall with similarly arranged limbs, their fingers exploring the video cracks in the dry mud. A couple of the men scamper over the top of the wall with reptilian speed and ease. It's a really vivid depiction. The lighting by Natasha Chivers completes the desert experience perfectly.

The underwater segment is also remarkable, with its imitation of moving weightlessly through liquid and the final struggle against the elements may be a cautionary note to be wary of water and respect its power. Amen to that.

*Jasmina Wellinghoff covers dance for the Express-News.*