












Enhancing high-tech effects with their superhuman skills

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For 70 spellbinding minutes Thursday night at the Annenberg Center, the English dance troupe Motionhouse defied gravity - and common sense - in a multimedia spectacle that was joyous, tender, frenetic, disturbing, funny, and absolutely thrilling. Much-traveled Motionhouse is on its first U.S. tour, celebrating its 25th anniversary with *Scattered*, created by artistic director and cofounder Kevin Finnan.

This series of loosely interrelated scenes focuses on the theme of water and its various states: ice, snow, rain, steam. All this, and much more, is conveyed largely through an ever-changing film from the Spanish company Logela, projected onto Simon Dormon's set - an enormously tall, gray fiberglass curve, reminiscent of an ocean wave, a skateboard ramp, or a piece by minimalist sculptor Richard Serra.



English troupe Motionhouse in multimedia spectacle "Scattered" at Annenberg...

I can't begin to understand how Finnan & Co. made these projections seem interactive, but it certainly looked as though the dancers who leaped up to touch the images of water on that curving wall were generating actual ripples. Yet, *Scattered's* most engaging aspects depended not on high-tech special effects, but on the old-fashioned human (superhuman?) skills and talents of these seven young performers.

I gasped the first time the most fearless of them all - tiny, flame-haired Rebecca Williams - launched herself from the top of the set, since clearly no one could survive such a fall. But Williams didn't fall; she gracefully skimmed the surface, landed softly, and bounded up to continue dancing. Every cast member spent a lot of time hurtling across, hanging upside-down from, doing cartwheels atop, or inching backward up that wall, and it was endlessly exciting.

There were a few sequences in which performers "flew," attached to safety harnesses, but Motionhouse doesn't need any mechanical help to fly. The dancers probably don't need a "theme" either, and occasionally, the much-too-loud music (by Sophy Smith and Tim Dickinson) became a serious distraction. But you've never seen anything like this. And you should.

Additional performances:

2 and 8 p.m. Saturday at the Annenberg Center, 3680 Walnut St. Tickets: \$20-\$55. Information: AnnenbergCenter.org or 215-898-3900.