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Randy James a hot ticket

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Summertime used to be the season when dance in New Jersey drew to a grinding halt. Not this summer.

Among the many great performances presented so far, dance fans were able to savor the work last month of one of New Jersey's most impressive emerging choreographers — Randy James.

James' company, Randy James Dance Works, presented its second home season June 28-30 at New Brunswick's George Street Playhouse.

Like silence, stillness and its cousin — ultra slow movement — can be a difficult quality to master. Only the boldest (and bravest) choreographers seem willing to use it. And few of those choreographers who are willing

to use it know how to use it well. James does both.

This means that in "With alligators in the bayou-you water ski real good," given its New Jersey premiere here, James not only shows us the good ol', foot-shaking, bounding through the air good times of life on the bayou, but lets us feel the unbearably hot sun that beats down on the back and makes life slow to a crawl.

As with the compelling performance of Kim Reis in the "Beast of Burden" solo, James' dancers showed off a masterful display of control, both physical and emotional. Moments that in lesser hands could have seemed like watching paint dry, instead were wholly engrossing. There were no empty moments here.

James' "Estuary," another New Jersey premiere work, also proved mesmerizing. Here, the effect of stillness and ultra slow movements were heightened by the use of silence.

The work's opening was typical of moments that had the audience literally gasping at the beautiful and engrossing imagery onstage.

On an otherwise dark stage, six hands move haltingly in unison into a rectangle of light, fingers outstretched. Then as the hands lift slowly, their ascent is followed by six heads, all lifting into the shaft of light.

While some choreographers might have chosen at this point to speed things up or add some music, James continues to explore the possibilities here, working in silence. The six bodies, still moving in unison unfurl into patterns — legs lift, cross and uncross, heads twist, eyes lift. The six bodies lower to the floor seemingly on a collective breath, perhaps a sigh.

So magical were these moments that I felt a little disappointed when the near stillness and silence ended.