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Kitchendances Debuts with 'Decimation Blues'

Soulful dances by Mauriah Kraker and guests

By [John Schneider \(by-author-164-1.html\)](http://shepherdexpress.com/by-author-164-1.html) Jul. 14, 2015

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Kitchendances - Photo By Mauriah Kraker

Milwaukee dancer and choreographer Mauriah Kraker made her debut as a producer last week with a soulful concert at The Box downtown. Titled *Decimation Blues*, it was serious in subject and admirably danced. Intimate solos by Kraker opened and closed the show. Thematically related dances by/with three male dancer friends gave it substantial body. Kraker's company, Kitchendances, so-named because her work and daily life are inseparable, is off to a great start.

Kraker began her dance career training as a rhythmic gymnast. She led the US team at the 2002 World Championships. Something of the athlete remains in her dancing, not in any flashiness but in the precision of each movement, the uncompromising focus, clarity of line and ever-present energy. Moving or still, she allows you to ponder her face and body; there's a Mona Lisa beauty and mystery about her. She's always intensely alive, thinking, feeling and making choices.

Managing difficult life passages was the dominant subject of *Decimation Blues*. In the opening solo, "SINKNG," Kraker slowly folded paper into little boats, the dance floor her sea. When she danced, you saw a person hurting, lost in memory. She'd elongate to stay afloat, but the peril seemed internal, a state of mind. In her closing solo, "Outer Dark," she took control, the peril was life's unknowableness; the question one of readiness. You understood this, not because she pantomimed it but because her dancing let you in.

Quinn Dixon, a Milwaukeean and graduate of UW-Milwaukee's dance program now dancing in New York, made "BEZ" with Kraker and danced it solo. It includes extraordinary passages of violent movement in which Dixon strikes himself repeatedly as if attacked by bees in his brain. His struggle for serenity was beautiful. At last, he slowly crossed the stage, the master of himself, a fragile pride in his eyes.

"High Plain," co-choreographed and performed by Kraker and Jose A. Luis (another UWM grad and now a Chicago dancer) took the Old West as a metaphor for present perils. This non-sentimental duet about love-as-partnership showed vulnerable individuals facing hardships, even horrors, with quiet resolve and mutual respect.

Kensaku Shinohara, a Japanese choreographer working in New York, made "Trio" for Kraker, Dixon and himself. Kraker and Dixon begin as partners. Enter Shinohara, an electrifying presence, to unsettle relationships and identities. In the end, Kraker is alone and the men partnered. How did that happen? Every complicated sensitive moment was an explanation.

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