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REVIEW	

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## *Scott Wells and Dancers*

*What Men Want: 'Dream Dance for Two', 'Catch', 'Bach Solo Trio', 'Call of the Wild'*

*May 2009  
San Francisco, Counterpulse*

*by Renee Renouf*

The stark white wall at Counterpulse provides a visual equivalent to the rigorous demands of classical ballet for performers in this 88-seat space; they need the contrast as a framework for frequently less than fully developed technique or craft in choreography.

What Men Want was Scott Wells' contribution to the San Francisco International Arts Festival, performing both weekends and providing the finale, May 31 performance of this truncated 2009 season.

I was happily surprised with the caliber and concept; the condition of the largely male ensemble appearing in the four numbers was light years better than previous exposures to Wells' work, indicating the caliber of performer Wells has begun to attract. Varied in height and volume, the men hurled their weight in space with a precision fascinating with their sheer bulk briefly displaced from the earth.

Dream Dance for Two featured women prominently; this first work brought the women and men together, amplified by a beautifully-delivered narrative about a 37-year old lesbian making out with a 22-year old artist in a night-club lavatory with menstrual blood mixed in. The women were visually unified by varying styled black tights, I wanted more uniformity in tee-shirts minus the visual distraction of multiple spaghetti straps. The women's postural styles proclaimed one or two still partially trained.

This deliberate sick-making text was followed by Catch, with Zack Bernstein and Aaron Jessup creating continual suspense with juggling with two, three and four small balls, their placement, movement and timing exciting.

Following intermission, Bach solo trio used the Bach Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor. Suzanne Lappas appeared at the beginning and the end, a mover by far the most

intriguing women of the five listed in this program of evolving contact improvisation. Lappas, with her elongated arms, legs and a face of angular elegance framed by slightly red hair, easily appears intelligent, introspective, less self-consciously aware than the other four women. She was given movement akin to a volley in tennis which she managed to make look attractive, with the difference that the connecting movements were rounded, almost off hand, scarcely a tennis trajectory.

The trio provided vigorous contact improv to the sonorous strains of Bach, tumbling, hurtling through space, rolling, and both grasping and lifting. It was an amazing use of Bach, although the musical repetitions could not mask the limits of visual interpretation, despite an admirable effort to hew contact improv to the chosen aural structure. Andrew Ward, Sebastian Grubb and Cameron Growden were the exponents.

Call of the Wild utilized the collective testosterone of eight men to sometimes hilarious advantage, posturing fiercely to wimpy accusation, evolving into frequent trios of jumping, catching and releasing, as well as lunges against the stark white wall, the floor thoughtfully spread with padding. Using popular music, including What Do I Have to Do to Prove My Love to You?, this intensely male exhibition was a clear demonstration of contact improv evolution; it clearly was a piece the eight men loved performing. Since I saw them on the final night of eight, the previously mentioned men plus Rajendra Serber, Cason MacBride, and Ryder Darcy performed with sureness and understandable zest. Though I still think the style has considerable limits, I did enjoy myself.