

## Choreographer hits target with playful mischief

Rachel Howard, Chronicle Dance Correspondent  
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Scott Wells may be the least ambitious choreographer in San Francisco, and the most original. Because he creates his dances without pretense or posturing, he hits upon moments of unexpected beauty and hilarity that more calculating choreographers only dream of.

I don't mean to deny Wells' tremendous craft. It also helps that Wells is a master of Contact Improvisation, and that his dancers are as wont to turn flips off the wall as go flying across the floor. But the real thrills are in their guileless sense of play. The latest Scott Wells & Dancers season, continuing next weekend at CounterPulse as part of the San Francisco International Arts Festival, is full of mischief that turns surprisingly tender.

In "Call of the Wild," a loose riff on New Age "male encounters," Sebastian Grubb leads a circle of guys through screeching martial arts maneuvers that veer into crying and soft embraces. They stand in lines and pose, some with ballet arms or pinup postures, others flexing like bodybuilders. I cannot tell you why these standard-issue gender games are so refreshing in Wells' hands, except to guess it has something to do with Wells being straight, and amused rather than politicizing. No one is better at revealing the absurdities of masculinity even as he celebrates them.

The rest of the program is dominated by Wells' rangy, beautiful men. In the new "Bach Solo Trio," the gorgeously fluid Suzanne Lappas presents a swirling movement phrase that three men revisit to the weighty Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor. The first half of the show is weaker; "Catch," a juggling duet for Zack Bernstein and Aaron Jessup, was too emotionally simple, and "Dream Dance for Two," a remounting of Wells' collaboration with the spunky Mission writer Michelle Tea, suffered from an overly precious reading of her story.

Andrew Ward came out next for a soft-as-air solo to LaVerne Butler's "Please Send Me Someone to Love." The audience sighed with satisfaction, a frequent occurrence at a Scott Wells show.

**Scott Wells & Dancers:** Thurs.-Sun. Part of the San Francisco International Arts Festival. CounterPulse, 1310 Mission St., San Francisco. Tickets: \$20-\$25. (800) 838-3006. [www.sfiarf.org](http://www.sfiarf.org).



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