

Body Electric

REVIEW:

Electric Idols

haus of bambi

Choreography by Robert Woofter

The REACH

John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

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By Val Oliphant



The music was bumping as we arrived for Robert Woofter's *Electric Idols* at the Kennedy Center's new REACH space this past Friday evening, for an installment of the center's Local Dance Commissioning Project. Audience members dressed to fit the show: floor-length fur coats, sparkly cut-to-the-navel dresses, and dads with beards and braided pigtails. And for an artist whose *nom de danse* is Bambi Warhol, that's no surprise. Woofter's mesmerizing liturgical-dance-meets-club-culture tribute to Queer nightlife embodied the idea that for many queer people, dance and nightclubs become both their religious expression and house of worship.

Electric Idols was D.C.-based performance artist Woofter's collaboration with several well-known artists from the Electric Dance Music (EDM) and Queer scenes in D.C. Lemz, the DJ and producer behind the quarterly queer dance party at 9:30 Club and Wonderland Ballroom's SLEAZE, a gay disco celebration, composed the driving music. Scotto, who designed and ran lights at a huge laundry list of NYC's best nightclubs and performed at Ravestock, the first EDM mega-festival at Woodstock '94, perfectly tailored the lighting to the outdoor venue as daylight faded to dusk. Lights were minimal while the sun was up, focusing on the white set with a keyhole illuminated by an electric blue strip of neon. As the sun set, spotlights highlighted the four dancers swathed in white mesh shorts, red briefs, and white crops tank top with a sequined heart go-go dancing atop four white boxes. Once dark, increasingly colorful flashes lit up the stage.

Woofter's choreography featured a fascinating mix of religious iconography and the joyful, hedonistic dancing of a nightclub. The sign of the cross morphed into voguing. One dancer blessed another, drawing a cross on their forehead with their thumb like a Catholic priest. A baptism turned into a sensual romp on the floor. As the four dancers removed their shirts, sweat gleamed off their chiseled bodies while they posed like Calvin Klein models. They assembled in a series of tableaux recreating iconic religious art -- God's finger reaching in Michelangelo's "The Creation of Adam," a crowd gathered around one dancer with arms extended like Matthias Gothart's crucifixion, and then carrying a limp body like Michelangelo's marble Pieta.



While the Christian imagery sounds heavy, *Electric Idols* maintained an ebullient tone as dancers bounced between sweeping contemporary leaps, sensual grinding, fast-paced voguing, and playful twerking. EDM culture has long had spiritual overtones, including a strong sense of community and ecstatic trance experiences. When mainstream religions excluded LGBTQ followers, many found solace in club culture by asserting “dance is my religion.”

For decades, nightclubs have offered queer and othered people a safe space to congregate and be themselves. In the wake of the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting, many wondered if this sacred space would be permanently shattered. Last year, Dance Exchange explored the loss of LGBTQ spaces in the DMV area in Matthew Cumbie’s *Growing Our Own Gardens*, with an onstage reading of a list of closed queer spaces. *Electric Idols* showed us that queer spaces are still thriving. At the end of the show, I wondered if any of my friends were free to go dancing that night.

Photos: haus of bambi in *Electric Idols*, choreography by Robert Woofter, photo by Jati Lindsay, courtesy Kennedy Center