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Dance fest moves amid backyard serenity

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SUSAN WALKER
SPECIAL TO THE
STAR

Eroca Nicols
is on a
mission to
make



SUPPLIED PHOTO

A 2009 DIMBY performance.

contemporary dance fun and accessible – by placing it in the most informal setting imaginable.

Last year, inspired by a cry in her little west-end community to see dancing outdoors, she started DIMBY: Dance in My Backyard. About 50 people came to each of three performances put on in a narrow backyard opposite Dufferin Grove Park, where Nicols had been giving children's dance lessons.

This year, Nicols' company Lady Janitor, the Cube 3 collective and a Montreal improv group, Les Imprudanses, are reprising DIMBY, in a bigger, neighbouring backyard, where they estimate they can accommodate 100 people – if spectators don't mind sitting cosily with their neighbours.

"I realized there wasn't a lot of family-friendly contemporary dance – it is often a little bit angsty. I was really interested in programming for families without programming down to children," says Nicols, a relative newcomer to the Toronto dance scene. Canadian-born, she was raised in Sacramento, Calif., and trained as a visual artist around Oakland. She danced with an Afro-Haitian folkloric group and took up performance art (Lady Janitor was her handle, because she once did such work for a living).

About five years ago, Nicols came to Toronto. She started DIMBY on "zero money," relying on the "kindness of strangers and friends" to provide the space, the outdoor furniture and the word-of-mouth. This year's event is partly funded by the Toronto Arts Council.

Lady Janitor's dances put the emphasis on fun. *The In Crowd*, recalling the characters at a typical 1960s high-school dance, is full of stunts and acrobatics.

Cube 3 are returning to DIMBY with *Cat Piece*. Les Imprudanses divide themselves into four teams and hand out cards to the audience for a series of dance improv games, where spectators get to vote on the winning team.

Since all that activity is bound to stimulate appetites, each performance is followed by a reception catered by local organic food specialist Guerrilla Gourmet.

Nicols believes in bringing dance to the community, and making it accessible in every way she can. "I watch what's happening with *So You Think You Can Dance* and I'm so excited that people are getting into dance and deciding that that's something they want to see more of."

Just the facts

WHAT: Dance in My Backyard

WHEN: Friday, 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, 2:30 and 7:30 p.m.

WHERE: 171 Havelock St.

(south of Bloor St. W.)

TICKETS: Pay-what-you-can, suggested donation of \$10. Info at

danceinmybackyard@gmail.com

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