

# 'Maverick Strain' an elegy of opposites

By Anne Marie Welsh  
DANCE CRITIC

Sometimes an artist creates a work that sums up an entire creative life. In the case of San Francisco choreographer Joe Goode, that would be his 1996 "The Maverick Strain."

The work is a whole world, a transformation of Goode's core beliefs — about people and art — into a

smooth, sensual, warmly humorous meditation upon the maverick spirit in the age of AIDS.

"The Maverick Strain" is elegiac like his smaller-scaled "Remembering the Pool at the Best Western" (1991). But here Goode achieves a balance between pathos and humor, the political and the personal, dance and theater because he's so in command of the elements of his craft — text, movement, visuals (by

Nayland Blake) and music (by Beth Custer).

Goode metamorphoses, usually before our eyes, from a flamboyant gay guy in a two-character play to a Dolly Partonesque saloon girl singing shlocky ballads to a John Wayne figure strolling across the Western landscape, a procession of gun-toting maverick imitators close behind.

## Exquisitely witty

That recurring passage is exquisitely witty, and beautifully lit by Jack Carpenter. In his fringed cowboy shirt, with his shambling walk and sanctimonious talk, Goode repeats Wayne's dumbed-down rhymes like mantras, his hand close to his gun, for there's killin' to be done. Yet some of the best scenes in the two-hour-long work are for the women of his Joe Goode Performance Group — veteran Liz Burrit and her drawling sidekick Jennifer Wright Cook. As a couple of Southwest barflies they talk and perform a smoothly gymnastic duet on chairs. Over, above, balancing, tumbling, they conjure difficult men who never stay put, while moving themselves with buttery softness. Goode's dancers share his low-key approach to performing — they're deadpan and dead-on-target, with little visible tension in the movement, no high-voltage, hard-sell energy in their projection. They give this work unusual warmth and appeal.

Goode first performed here in 1984, before he had a company. He knew intuitively that movement and voice both issue from breath, and he found what few other choreographers have — a linkage in the body's core between the rational and the physical. Gestures don't illustrate words; they deepen and amplify their meaning.

In one encounter in "The Maverick Strain," cowboys Goode and Vong Phrommala carry on a fractured conversational seduction with Burrit and Cook. An index finger touches a chair, an arm sidles up a body, and finally Goode asks a key rhetorical question about relationships: "Did you ever get to know a man better by asking him questions?"

When the finger points and the arms sidles up again, you smile.

"The Maverick Strain" also has a simple political message: To stay human, "get sloppy," get involved. The isolating maverick is an icon of alienation; other mavericks go against the tide for the common good. Such meanings percolate up subliminally, comically, and they're never fixed.

For the San Diego performances, which are co-sponsored by inSITE97, Goode arranged three opening scenes in three different open spaces of the big ReinCarnation building, home

**inSITE97**

## DANCE REVIEW

### "The Maverick Strain"

8 p.m. today and tomorrow.  
Sushi Performance and  
Visual Art. 320 11th Ave.,  
downtown. \$15-\$20. (619)  
235-8466.

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# 'Maverick'

Unexpected images colored the performance

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to Sushi Performance and Visual Art. The audience traveled in three groups, led about like little doggies by a trio of cattle-rustling roustabouts.

## Tired caregiver

In one scene, Goode and Burrit play Dottie and Leonard. She's in bed, hiding from the world, tired of

being a caregiver in the age of AIDS; he's a flamboyant gay friend who's wheedling her to get back in gear; their ongoing conversation threads its way throughout the evening.

Another, more somber scene occurs in a basement room filled with mourning dresses and veils; it juxtaposes contrasting events. The third scene is voyeuristic; it is the least organic of the evening's vignettes.

Perhaps because of this peripatetic opening, "The Maverick Strain" got off to a slow start. It didn't build rhythmic and thematic momentum quite soon enough. But once the overall pacing kicked in, it

wove together scene after scene, dance after dance, speech after speech, colored by unexpected images, emotions, rhythms.

A \$100,000 grant from the Pew Charitable Trust supported the creation of this work, which just goes to show that money can buy the time, opportunity and collaborators every gifted choreographer needs to realize his potential.

■  
**Choreographer:** Joe Goode. **Designer:** Nayland Blake. **Composer:** Beth Custer. **Lighting:** Jack Carpenter. **Costumes:** Charles G. Baldwin. **Dancers:** Felipe Barrueto-Cabello, Liz Burrit, Jennifer Wright Cook, Joe Goode, Marc Morozumi, Vong Phrommala.



BILL PACK

**Support system:**  
Vong Phrommala (top) performs with many partners in Joe Goode's "The Maverick Strain."