

Oct. 16, 2010

Charlotte Street Foundation salutes its performance award winners

By STEVE PAUL

The Kansas City Star

The Charlotte Street Foundation last week showed off the two winners of its 2010 Generative Performing Arts Awards, an event that not only premiered some exciting works but also erupted into a kind of guerrilla celebration of the local arts scene.

At a lightly attended affair in the Polsky Theater at Johnson County Community College, composer, bandleader and award winner Brad Cox introduced a sizzling new nine-piece group in a series of barely controlled, edge-of-the-seat “structured improvisations.”

With four percussionists, two bassists, two saxophonists and Cox at the keyboards, the nonet presented a bold new outlet for his curious and endlessly creative musical mind. Cox can be found fronting the edgy Peoples Liberation Big Band, in monthly performances at the RecordBar, and holding down the musical side of the Owen/Cox Dance Group, along with his dancer/choreographer wife, Jennifer Owen.

For her part as a Charlotte Street award winner, theater artist (and UMKC faculty member) Stephanie Roberts

performed two pieces, including a dazzling clown narrative, “And Then.” With Gulshirin Dubash and Matt Weiss, Roberts combined clowning classicism with a pace and surreal vision reminiscent of Beckett’s “Waiting for Godot.” The performers proved that much can be accomplished with an umbrella, a wooden ladder and red, strap-on noses.



Then came a collaboration between Cox and Roberts, which prompted the

aforementioned eruption. Cox's ensemble performed while lined up behind another surreal tableau by Roberts, "Rugaciune" ("a prayer" in Romanian), using a marching band motif.



As that piece unfolded, in from the sides of the auditorium came the anarchic street performers and New Orleans style marching band known as the Dirty Force. The clash of rhythms, colors and artistic intentions — despite appearances, the band-crashing was planned — made for some polyphonic, to say the least, and joyful noise.

As a generous patron and catalyst of Kansas City's art world, the Charlotte Street Foundation couldn't have asked for more.