

# 'Rite of Spring' dance reveals perils of progress

June 18, 2012 |



Rebecca McLindon of the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble dances Saturday in "The Rite of Spring." / Natalie Bruno



By [Mark Stryker](#)

**Detroit Free Press Music Critic**

Of the many striking images choreographer Laurie Eisenhower creates in her newly conceived "The Rite of Spring," a sweeping parable about the double-edged sword of human "progress," one in particular continues to resonate in the aftermath of Saturday's Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival premiere.

Four dancers sit with their backs to the audience, staring like drugged zombies at hypnotizing rectangles of light -- televisions -- symbols of the dehumanizing effects of technology. Meanwhile, a solo dancer, Rebecca McLindon, twirls exuberantly around

the others, a beacon of eloquent self-expression and humanity amidst the mechanized wasteland. Igor Stravinsky's visceral score breathes life into her. The message seems to be that if we have any chance at all, art and the individual imagination will be our salvations.

The Great Lakes festival reached its midpoint with Stravinsky's famous "Rite." The festival collaborated with the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble to bring the work to the stage. This was one of the largest undertakings in Great Lakes history, but the ambition paid off handsomely in an inventive production that aimed high and often soared higher.

A number of major Stravinsky works are at the core of the 2012 festival, but the status of "The Rite of Spring" (1913) as a modernist icon and the rare chance to see a fully staged production held special allure.

Stravinsky's piano four-hands reduction of his massive orchestral score provided the backbone. Pianists Elizabeth and Eugene Pridonoff untangled the rhythmic densities with admirable clarity. The welcome addition of three players from Percussion Group Cincinnati interpolating Stravinsky's original orchestration restored a small but potent measure of the savageness lost in the piano arrangement.

Vaslav Nijinsky's groundbreaking original choreography told the story of a sacrificial virgin who dances herself to death. Eisenhower's retelling charts a birth-death-resurrection arc through human history, building tableaux around human conflict, the discovery of fire and the inventions of, among others, writing, the wheel, machines, cell phones and a mysterious force that ultimately annihilates us. A simple curtain backdrop, effective lighting and sleek white costumes added to the starkness of the conception.

There was wit -- a wheelbarrow, roller skates and bicycle lightened the mood -- but not much optimism. Eisenhower sometimes sent bodies ricocheting off each other to match the music's violence; elsewhere, she put individuals in lonely silos. The evocation of the primordial dawn of life, with the dancers covered by a large, gauzy curtain and "erupting" in time to Stravinsky's syncopations seemed to wink at Disney's "Fantasia," while some stomping suggested Nijinsky. But Eisenhower was telling her own story in her own way.

She set up an intriguing parallel near the end, placing a woman in a dominant role where a man had been at the start. If women were in charge, would things end any

better for humanity? Eisenhower leaves the question unresolved, but without art, it won't matter either way.

**More Details: Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival**

FOUR STARS out of four stars

Saturday, Seligman Performing Arts Center, Beverly Hills

Festival continues through Sunday