

Sexy Struts

Eleganza mixes hip-hop and hot hemlines on the runway.

START WITH a stance that points the heel of one foot toward the middle of the other. Stand up tall, your back slightly arched. Stride forward with a “high-confidence walk,” says Safiya Miller ’09. “Your body is moving fluidly—no stiff arms. No choppy walks or high knees, either. It should look natural. Have a controlled gaze: pick a spot in the distance and focus on it.” Voilà! You are walking the walk of a runway model. Miller was set to do just that at this year’s *Eleganza* show, late in April before about 2,000 spectators at Bright Hockey Center. “There’s an element of mystery to modeling that attracts peo-

ple,” explains Morgan Radford ’09, another of the show’s models. “They wonder, ‘What is she thinking?’”

Held annually at Harvard each spring since 1995, *Eleganza* differs markedly from commercial runway fashion shows, whose mission is to sell a particular designer’s product line. *Eleganza* is a show about style, where 45 male and female Harvard undergraduates (chosen from about 200 who auditioned this year) strut their stuff and dance in a wide range of outfits donated by several designers and stores. It’s elaborately produced—with lighting, stagecraft, hip-hop music, Jumbotron projections, spirited perfor-



Lean on me: Lauren Westbrook ’07 and Mark Marynick ’06 at the 2006 *Eleganza* show.

mon wisdom and flipping it on its head,” Klein argues. The brief, highly accessible book romps through metaphysics, logic, epistemology, and ethics, and includes chapters on philosophy of religion and language, all studded with references to films, songs, current events, and anecdotes. It informs us that even though Sherlock Holmes is celebrated for his “deductions,” he generally used not *deductive* but *inductive* logic—carefully observing the situation, then generalizing from his prior experience using analogy and probability. Take the time, for example, when:

Holmes and Watson are on a camping trip. In the middle of the night Holmes wakes up and gives Dr. Watson a nudge. “Watson,” he says, “look up at the sky and tell me what you see.”

“I see millions of stars, Holmes,” says Watson.

“And what do you conclude from that, Watson?”

Watson thinks for a moment. “Well,” he says, “astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. Meteorologically, I expect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. Theologically, I see that God is all-powerful, and that we are small and insignificant. Uh, what does it tell you, Holmes?”

“Watson, you idiot! Someone has stolen our tent!”

The authors also explore relativity of time, as with this example:

There is a knock on the door, but when the woman answers it, there’s only a snail. She picks it up and throws it across the yard. Two weeks later there’s another knock on the door. The woman answers the door, and there’s the snail again. The snail says, “What was that all about?”

“We take on some pretty hard ideas,” says Klein. “Like com-

paring Kant’s categorical imperative to the Golden Rule—they’re similar, but not the same.” He can’t resist adding, “A sadist is a masochist who follows the Golden Rule.”

Klein is clearly the jokester, Cathcart the philosopher; the latter, as part of a “checkered” career that included stints as a divinity student, probation officer, hospital administrator, and hospice director, has even taught philosophy for three years at Westbrook Junior College in Portland, Maine, and recently published a piece on St. Anselm’s ontological argument in *Theology Today*. Klein wrote jokes for television quiz shows and comics like Flip Wilson, Godfrey Cambridge, and Lily Tomlin before switching to books, of which he has written dozens, including *The Half-Jewish Book*, novelty works like *Where’s Elvis?*, nine novels, and one previous collaboration with Cathcart, *Macho Meditations* (1997), which Cathcart calls “*faux* inspirations for beer drinkers.”

They began the *Plato* project by holing up for a weekend with a dictionary of philosophy and a few joke books at a motel in Gloucester, Massachusetts. “You can’t start with a philosophical concept and try to find a joke for it,” Cathcart explains. “The joke is primary.” But “Most jokes are puns,” says Klein, “and 99 percent of puns do not have philosophical content.” When Klein found a joke—many are Jewish jokes, one of his staples—with “a philosophical feel or smell,” Cathcart might dissect it to reveal, say, that its punch line depends on someone violating the law of non-contradiction. “It’s an entertaining way to learn philosophy,” says Klein. The authors, who live with their respective wives in the Berkshires (Klein) and on Cape Cod (Cathcart), worked mostly by e-mail and phone, then convened to polish the final draft.

The result is one of those rare volumes of which an author can remark, as Klein does, “Some of the best jokes are in logic and metaphysics.”

~C.L.

MONTAGE

mances, and some superbly choreographed dancing.

“Everything we wear is very edgy and very hip,” says Radford, “and you can wear these clothes off the catwalk.” Sponsored by Black Community and Student Theater (BlackCAST), a student organization that promotes involvement of African-American undergraduates in theater, *Eleganza* is a one-night performance showcasing an international cast of black, white, Asian, Native American, Indian, Caribbean, and Latin models, among others. It has long been known as one of Harvard’s sexiest and most entertaining evenings.

“It’s the combination of dancing, modeling, and acting that produces such a high-energy environment,” Radford explains. “For one night, Harvard students are models,” says former *Eleganza* model Amanda Brown ’09, who, with Alexis Maule ’08, produced this year’s show. “In real life, we’re so far from being models!”

Perhaps, but for two hours they do a fair simulation. Preparations begin with fundraising and sponsor-seeking a year in advance (Morgan Stanley, Microsoft, 85 Broads, Red Bull, Liz Claiborne, and the Cambridge boutique Mint Julep were among this year’s angels; Harvard insures the clothes), and intensive rehearsals follow the February auditions. Models, of course, must look good, but “Presence and energy have so much to do with it,” explains Elena Abrosimova ’09, this year’s creative director. “You need the confidence and charisma to go out there and entertain thousands of people.” Model coaches from John Robert Powers were hired to work with the performers.

Varsity athletes of both sexes often appear on the runway, showing off bodies that are, naturally enough, in superb condition. For example, brothers Desmond and Brenton Bryant, both defensive ends for Har-

vard’s football team, were set to take part in this spring’s show, with Desmond ’08 returning from 2006. “I like being in front of big crowds,” says Brenton ’09. “I’m used to it because of football.”

This spring’s “revelry”-themed show had four segments, each with its own fashion director: Rio’s *Carnaval*, with samba music; the American South in the 1920s and 1930s, with jazz; the New York City underground scene, with punk and funk; and European high-fashion clubs, backed by techno. A sequence required a minimum of 20 models, with each appearing twice for at least 40 “looks” per segment, or 160 to 200 looks in the entire show. *Eleganza* gives the audience an eye-ful for its \$12 admission.

Though *Eleganza* is completely nonverbal, the group “scenes” do have narrative elements. The choreography and pairing of models celebrate diversity and interracial connections, both sexual and otherwise. “No one sets out to make a conscious social statement,” Abrosimova explains. “Instead, we focus on creating something provocative and playful.”

Since its founding, *Eleganza* has been outgrowing its venues, moving from Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School to House dining halls to Lowell Lecture Hall and now Bright. Most of its budget, which exceeds \$25,000, goes for sound and constructing and lighting the 40-foot runway and a 48-foot-wide stage. Any profits are donated to the Center for Teen



TIFFANY HSU

Sultry stances: in the foreground, Tiffany Threadcraft ’07 (center) and Lauren Westbrook pose and preen in last year’s show.

Empowerment, a Boston youth program. Interest in “hot fun” as well as hot clothes seems on the rise at Harvard. Katiti Kironde ’79, a senior designer at an international clothing retailer, says that in her undergraduate days, making theatrical costumes was her only outlet for apparel design. “There was an anti-fashion feeling,” she recalls. “There was a kind of snobbery—you were a lightweight if you were that concerned with fashion.” For the last two years, Kironde has helped *Eleganza* with resources and ideas, and on the day of the show, she irons clothes and helps dress the models. “People have decided,” she says, “that it’s OK to be smart and also be chic.” ~C. L.

~Who proclaimed that photography is to painting as water is to wine?

~Who protested, “They have taken away all our liberties—now they have given us jury trials!”?

Stephen Oresman seeks a source and precise wording for military advice allegedly given by the Duke of Wellington to a young subaltern: “Eat, sleep, and defecate at every available opportunity.”

Chapter & Verse

Correspondence on not-so-famous lost words

“mediocre” (March-April). Fred Shapiro, editor of the *Yale Book of Quotations* (see “Harvard in Epigram,” January-February, page 84), offers two variants: “Only mediocrity can be trusted to be always at its best. Genius must always have lapses

proportionate to its triumphs” (Max Beerbohm, in the *Saturday Review* [November 5, 1904]) and “Only a mediocre writer is always at his best” (in W. Somerset Maugham’s introduction to *The Portable Dorothy Parker* [1944]).

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