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## When edgy men dance into the ring

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That Michael Trent really is a character. In two dances he commissioned for his show *Invisible Borders*, on until tomorrow night at Harbourfront Centre Theatre, Trent is the consummate actor/dancer.

Montreal choreographer Louise Bédard pairs Trent with Dominique Porte, a dancer of considerable strength and dramatic range, in an elaborate parody of a modern dance called *Vivement Dimanche*. The two characters enter the stage with a stack of pointy cardboard party hats that they lay out on the floor. One can't help but notice how exaggerated and self-conscious their movements are. Trent wears a shirt and tie and grey flannel pants, like the bored office worker in the movie *Shall We Dance?* Porte wears a funny little pink outfit, half skirt and half shorts and too contrived.

To the rather random music of Bernard Falaise, they do a campy duet: He strains to manipulate her around the stage as she feigns nonchalance and strikes a pose wherever she can. She gets lost in her steps and almost grinds to a halt, like an over-wound mechanical doll. He takes up a manic, fetish-like patting of his forearm. Trent is hilarious, with a slight Jean-Paul Belmondo look about him. Porte swans around, oblivious to everything beyond her thoughts.

Moments later, Trent returns to the stage in a much more serious mode, this time dancing with New Yorker Doug Varone, in a stunning duet Varone created, *The thing of the world*. Two guys in black shirts and grey pants — cool, urban, mutually threatening — confront each other in a space the size of a boxing ring. John Mackey's "Juba," a Steve Reichian electronic composition, urges them into intense configurations. They might be two guys who meet at a bar. Maybe they're going to get into a fight. More likely, they're going to have sex.

Varone is a choreographer who dramatizes relationships in dance. Turns out he's very good at enacting them, too. He has a look that shifts like the sky with an incoming storm, from seductive to menacing to aloof. Trent holds his own, alluring but just out of reach. They dance to an exhausted embrace.

Trent's own, hour-long *things in between*, runs close to the kind of dance parodied by Bédard. It's a puzzling, often aggravating piece on the theme of space. Sasha Ivanochko, Kirsten Pollard, Brad Sykes and Darryl C. Tracy move about on what looks like an indoor court for some kind of sport. Between live action, pre-recorded video, live video and dancers glimpsed through a scrim, there's sense of players and their ghosts. The dancers step out of their roles and start talking to each other and then to members of the audience, who get invited to switch seats with those on the other side of the space. It's always dangerous to break the spell of performance and once this is done in *things in between*, Trent risks losing our attention.