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Looking at Love, No Sugarcoating Required

By GIA KOURLAS

This week the Lounge at Dixon Place, a pub cozy enough to make you sentimental for the old East Village and for the way that so many theaters in Europe actually have bars, is the center of a first-time festival celebrating dance from the former Yugoslav republics.

On Wednesday night Maja Delak and Luka Prinic opened the event, the X-YU Festival, with their collaboration "Ways of Love." Hosted by Dixon Place in association with Dance New Amsterdam and the performance group WaxFactory, the festival continues through the weekend with Matija Ferlin (from Croatia) and Dalija Acin (from Serbia).

The Slovene choreographers Ms. Delak and Mr. Prinic explore a side of love that is slightly sinister and slightly ridiculous; in "Ways of Love," they find titillation at the point where violence and longing meet. At the start, photographs of body parts, initially ambiguous, are screened on a large piece of fabric as fluorescent lights blink sporadically.

Ms. Delak, scantily clad, disappears behind the fabric, displaying her legs or wrapping herself in the cloth, as Mr. Prinic undresses completely, shakes his lower half with fervor and puts his clothes back on. (Just as Ms. Delak likes to grind her hips like a stripper, Mr. Prinic is in a constant state of dressing and undressing.)

While much of "Ways of Love" is a pastiche of familiar material, the collaborators approach their tasks with admirable daring. In one scene Ms. Delak slaps Mr. Prinic across the face; she keeps striking until he retaliates, and the aggression turns brutal.

When the Nina Simone recording of "I Want a Little Sugar in My Bowl" is played, Mr. Prinic crosses the stage holding a clear bowl of sugar cubes and proceeds to drop them into Ms. Delak's open mouth.

At first, it seems overly literal, but after her mouth is full, she faces the audience and sings along — the words are garbled — to another song. After the sugar melts in her mouth, she allows the excess to drool onto the floor, where it creates a congealed, waxy puddle; it's horrific but effective.

The finished product is one thing; more important, perhaps, is the way the festival provides a window into how experimental dance is developing in a region of the world. (Ivan Talijancic, founder and

co-artistic director of WaxFactory, selected the artists.) On Saturday there is marathon of sorts — performance times are staggered, at 5, 7 and 9 p.m. And in between shows, there's always the Lounge.

The X-YU Festival continues through Saturday at Dixon Place, 161A Chrystie Street, near Delancey Street, Lower East Side; (212) 219-0736, dixonplace.org.