



## Review: “Up Again, down again, UPAGAIN” at Neocortex Dance Theatre Company



"Up Again, Down Again, Up Again," with Neocortex Dance Theatre Company; Photo by Michelle Reid



**Feb 5, 2025 | By Tristan Bruns**

Dancer and choreographer Juan Enrique Roque Irizarry Jr. has been a mainstay on the Chicago dance scene for many years, performing in such companies as Identity Performing Arts and Movement Revolution Dance Crew; but now he steps into the role of Artistic Director of Neocortex Dance Theatre Company, which made its debut with “Up Again, down again, UPAGAIN: My Bipolar Experience” at Chicago Danztheatre Ensemble theater on Feb. 1. The company’s mission is to “promote awareness about mental health and mental illnesses, reduce stigma, and foster relatability.” “Up Again...” is based on Irizarry’s experience living with bipolar disorder, and it stems out of his MFA in Dance thesis at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The program also featured live music during preshow and intermission performed by Chromabeats.

Feb 5, 2025 | By Tristan Bruns

Dancer and choreographer Juan Enrique Roque Irizarry Jr. has been a mainstay on the Chicago dance scene for many years, performing in such companies as Identity Performing Arts and Movement Revolution Dance Crew; but now he steps into the role of Artistic Director of Neocortex Dance Theatre Company, which made its debut with "Up Again, down again, UPAGAIN: My Bipolar Experience" at Chicago Danztheatre Ensemble theater on Feb. 1. The company's mission is to "promote awareness about mental health and mental illnesses, reduce stigma, and foster relatability." "Up Again..." is based on Irizarry's experience living with bipolar disorder, and it stems out of his MFA in Dance thesis at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The program also featured live music during preshow and intermission performed by Chromabeats.



"Switching (The Oscillation of Polarity)," with Mark Gonzalez, Meg Gourley and Elisabeth Roskopf 이지영; Photo by Michelle Reid

"Sometimes I would lay in bed for days," says Irizarry describing bipolar symptoms during the preshow. Then he says he would slip into "(hypo)manic highs" and would commit to multiple projects at once, constantly bouncing between two extremes before therapy and medication offered stability. The opening work by Irizarry, "Switching (The Oscillation of Polarity)" is based on these symptoms. Dancer Meg Gourley plays Self, a figure standing dejectedly in a spotlight while being manipulated and manhandled by Depression (Elisabeth Roskopf 이지영) and (Hypo)Mania (Mark Gonzalez). Self starts by standing stationary and staring forward, as if examining their face in the mirror, but doesn't recognize their own reflection, as Depression and (Hypo)Mania use their hands to distort the appearance of Self's head—smushing their cheeks, covering their eyes, ears and mouth, and placing flat palms on their forehead.

They dig their fingers into Self's brain, mimicking the emerging sound of a piano being lightly pricked. Depression forces Self to the floor and together they writhe in agony; as the music builds in intensity, (Hypo)Mania grabs Self by the head and spins them in a daring two-person, airborne and rotating corkscrew—such impressive movement phrases are indicative of Irizarry's daring, acrobatic and serpentine dance style. "Switching" uses intricate and complex dance sequences to convey a simple metaphor that is easily understandable.



"Switching (The Oscillation of Polarity)," with Mark Gonzalez and Meg Gourley; Photo by Michelle Reid

The second and final work on the program, "Up Again, Down Again, Up Again," choreographer Irizarry explores the intricate chemical imbalances in his brain. The work features an arpeggio-heavy live piano performance by Frank J. Glab, and dancers perform beneath a colorful, esoteric video projection by Alex Yasinovsky that resembles the lightshow of brain activity produced by an fMRI scan juxtaposed over neon outlines of star-shapes. Six dancers—Mark Gonzalez, Nik Graves, Audrey Hartnett, Hannah Huang, Francisco Melendez and Brady Neher—resemble processes of reasoning via multiple ripples moving outward from a straight line. They reach out their arms, literally grasping at conclusions. They dissolve and combine with one another to create interesting combinations, like an exciting two-person aileron roll, with one clutching to the other's torso as they spin through space. As Glab tinkles between the major 7th and tonic of a scale, the dancers tutt their fingers frantically like quick-firing neurons. Some works of dance and theater show you how it feels to step into someone else's shoes, but "Up Again..." feels like stepping into someone's brain!



"Up Again, Down Again, Up Again," with Neocortex Dance Theatre Company; Photo by Michelle Reid

"Up Again, down again, UPAGAIN" communicates what it is like to be an artist living with bipolar disorder, a back and forth between sober paralysis and intense creativity. Educational and entertaining, the value in Irizarry's work goes beyond enjoyment by eliciting feelings of empathy towards fellow humans and a better understanding of what it's like to be human.

*For more information about Neocortex Dance Theatre Company, click the company link below.*

## Related Organizations

---



**Neocortex Dance Theatre Company**

[Learn More](#)

---