

# The New York Times

## Would Daffy Approve? Perhapth

### Dance Heginbotham Presents ‘Manhattan Research’

By BRIAN SEIBERT Aug. 9, 2013

You may have known his music all your life without knowing his name. In the 1930s, [Raymond Scott](#) was at the forefront of avant-garde jazz. Later, he was an early inventor of electronic music and instruments. But in the 1940s, his compositions, zany yet fastidious, were adopted as the soundtracks for Warner Brothers cartoons. Much as European modernism became the sound of horror films, Scott’s experimental music became associated with Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck.

On Thursday at the Damrosch Park Bandshell, a suite of Scott’s compositions served as the soundtrack for “[Manhattan Research](#),” a new dance by [John Heginbotham](#). The work, a commission for [Lincoln Center Out of Doors](#), featured the [Raymond Scott Orchestrette](#), a jazz septet that includes accordion and electric zither.

Mr. Heginbotham — who founded his company, Dance Heginbotham, two years ago — comes with his own associations, primarily the 14 years he spent in the Mark Morris Dance Group. As a choreographer, his most obvious connection to Mr. Morris is a fidelity to music. With antic groupings, Egyptian arm bends and vaudeville steps, “Manhattan Research” doesn’t just capture the spirit of Scott; it makes visual the music’s form and offers an apt move or gesture for nearly every sound.

Also, Mr. Heginbotham is funny. Early on he introduces a motif of collapsing, as if the dancers were worn out by the music’s whirl. Later, after those surrounding the dancer Weaver Rhodes have fallen to the ground in succession, Mr. Rhodes earns a laugh by choosing to lie down.

It’s characteristic of Mr. Heginbotham that the joke is structural. Maile Okamura’s costumes, singlets that are black at the rear and white on the front,

with I ♥ NY logos, play cheekily with the Manhattan theme but also emphasize the importance in the choreography of who is facing forward or back.



**Manhattan Research** Lindsey Jones of Dance Heginbotham in this work's premiere, set to music by Raymond Scott, at the Damrosch Park Bandshell at Lincoln Center. Credit Paula Lobo for The New York Times

With their humor and step-for-note construction, Mr. Heginbotham's dances were called cartoony before he had anything to do with Raymond Scott. As with the composer, however, there is more to Mr. Heginbotham than comic animation. "Manhattan Research" ends with a cutesy visualization of the song "Siberian Sleigh Ride" (the whole dance is, in fact, a bit cutesy), but before that comes a duet for the dancers Winston Dynamite Brown and Kristen Foote. At its start, the Egyptian arms bends, silly up to this point, link two people. Yet as Mr.

Brown puts a hand and then his head on Ms. Foote's shoulder, she turns away and is finally lifted off by another man. It's a classical adagio without ballet steps.

Though the title "Manhattan Research" alludes to Scott's electronic music studio, the electronics are limited to a few space-age sounds. Yet the recorded music for the two dances by Mr. Heginbotham that followed suggested Scott's stylistic heirs. The wittily titled "throwaway" (2010) makes a wonderful quick joke of throwaway club moves to a techno song by Daft Punk about disposable technology.

"Twin" (2012), set to ambient electronica by Aphex Twin, is more substantial, a darker enigma in which the excellent John Eirich is fenced in and menaced by strange others. Here, the choreographer's skill with group patterning carries a threat: he makes simple hopping eerie. Perhaps Mr. Heginbotham shouldn't be taken — and shouldn't take himself — as merely loony.

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