

Dean Speer
Re: Men in Dance Festival 2012 (Seattle)
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Offline

Men in Dance, Friday October 12, 2012
Broadway Performance Hall, Seattle
by Dean Speer

The Broadway Performance Hall in Seattle began its life as the gym of the old, venerable Broadway High School and in 1979 re-opened as one of the premier mid-size theater venues available. I remember the date as I was in the very first performance – Repertory Dancers Northwest. Once we got to the actual show, it was exciting but waiting and wading through the final technical system bugs to be worked out was not. Everything was new, being used for the first time and while the show started an hour late [after an all-day technical rehearsal], the audience did not seem to mind.

How wonderfully things have grown and evolved since.

With only a small handful of men on our program, we could have easily been swallowed by the number and depth of talent and experience seen on the recent Men in Dance program that began its two-week run Friday 12 October.

While I'm thinking about it, the technical production side of things ran like a clock – smoothly and with really good lighting designs [Meg Fox] and execution. Little things are thought of, and appreciated, like partly bringing up the house lights in between pieces so we can collectively consult our programs.

Men in Dance – the Ninth Festival of Against the Grain's emcee, Kyle Cable, is the perfect host, warming and cheerfully welcoming and thanking everyone, who made taking care of business [the usual announcements] fun.

While none of the pieces this biennium made me think, "Wow! That's great choreography," the performance level of the adults was consistently and refreshingly high. I say "adults" as Kaleidoscope Dance Company, which presented a tribute to missed Seattle dance veteran, the late Jesse Jaramillo, is comprised of youth. Their work, "That's Why" bespoke [literally] of the cast's affinity for dance and how they didn't cave to peer pressure and didn't give it up, but re-affirmed and kept on dancing.

Christopher Montoya's best presentation of his work was "The Rehearsal" in which he did a run-through of a short ballet solo that previewed what he later did in the program but under the exotic guise of gussied up Doris Vidanya, a "guest" from the Ballet Trockadero de Monte Carlo. Unfortunately, it promised more than it delivered as the performance by Vidanya was weak, perhaps due to nerves or not being in top form – I don't know – but "she" threatened to topple, once for real and once faking it, crumpling under her own weighty and prolonged bow.

Petite, Montoya actually has really good and refined technique, and can move well. So, while it was fun enjoying a "star" from the Trocks and this may have been an obvious choice for his contribution, I think I'd rather see him in new or different choreography. He doesn't need to hide but should allow himself to be used in "serious" choreography. I know I'd enjoy seeing him move and bring his considerable artistry and years of experience to a pure dance work.

Iyun Harrison's best piece to date, "Tres Reyes" showcased three men, two of whom are beloved Seattle – Timothy Lynch and Jason Ohlberg and now the choreographer himself, Harrison. The title,

refers to Three Kings [of dance, presumably]. Harrison smartly made a work that was actual dance [and not primarily gesture] and which met the cast on their level, yet pushed and challenged them.

It would be tempting to say that “Snap” was snappy and it was. With four out-of-town dancers – from the BARE Dance Company of New York, “Snap” had a sophistication to it that I enjoyed. Kudos to dancers Christopher Argodale, Jake Bone, Christopher Coates and Evan Marsh.

Wade Madsen’s “Männer Tanz” or “Men's Dance” was intentionally humorous with five “suit” dancers making their gestural and movement way through their office day. Perhaps a comment that we all wear costumes, in every walk of life.

Deborah Wolf is also a much-experienced Seattle dance maker and her “Crash of Days” showed this experience with the premise and setup and the use of a hanging sculpture. His use of the floor and strong diagonals is remarkable.

Markeith Wiley’s “TRE” was an excerpt from an upcoming full-length work. While it is difficult to evaluate the work out of its broader context, the performances from Jesse Buckingham, Sean Tomerlin and Markeith Wiley were assured and committed.

Making use of the theatre’s technical capacity, “Interference Pattern” by Robert Dekkers used a film projection that functioned as a continuously moving and unfolding backdrop for dancers Patrick Kilbane and Dekkers.

Depicting a sweet male love duet, Ohlberg’s “The Bella Pictures” from 1997 was perhaps the most intimate [intimate in the sense of exposed vulnerability] of the program’s dances, nicely performed by Sam Picart and Sean Rosado.

Men in Dance continues at Broadway Performance Hall, Friday 10/19 through Sunday 10/21 with “Program 2” which will have some repeats but that features some new work too, including that of Olivier Wevers providing us with an anticipated world premiere.

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