

October 13, 2012

From Boys to Men in Dance

Written by Mariko Nagashima



Mike Esperanza's *Snap*.

Photo by Colleen Dishy

The biannual festival Men in Dance opened Friday, October 12, 2012, at Broadway Performance Hall with a strong showing demonstrating the different roles of male performers in dance today. Though men still largely dominate the field as choreographers and company directors, they are often under-represented onstage and the festival recognizes this fact by presenting all male performers. The first weekend's line-up shows the distinct phases of a male dancer's career, from young performers to college students and seasoned pros with a great variety of styles and aesthetics.

Tres Reyes, by Cornish professor Iyun Harrison, opened the evening. The three veteran dancers: Harrison, former PNB dancer Timothy Lynch, and former Hubbard Street dancer Jason Olhberg, showed a wonderful ease and command only garnered by years of experience. An eclectic mix of styles with clear jazz, classical modern, ballet, and African influences, the work had a ritualistic feel. The men stalked the floor with pacing walks, curtly bowing to each other before each performing solos, all with a sense of camaraderie, not competition, and an underlying current of stoicism.

Mike Esperanza's *Snap* shone with a particularly polished finish. Performed by four men of Esperanza's BARE Dance Company based in New York, the quartet featured a mesmerizing movement quality. Their bodies rippled like an oil slick, peppered with unexpected inversions and continually shifting patterns. Images of puppetry reappeared several times, with two dancers manipulating the others who mechanically swiped their arms through the air. The choreography was consistently inventive and engaging throughout, making it memorable for more than the dancers' gorgeous lines.

Markeith Wiley's excerpt of *TRE* offered a slightly grittier picture of masculinity, with Wiley and dancers Sean Tomerlin and Jesse Buckingham emanating a restless energy clad in wife-beaters and jeans. A hip hop infused contemporary piece, it gradually built in intensity along with the thumping bass of "Lost My Way," an original composition by Barry Sebastian. Repeated phrases, circle motifs, and a motion where they rocked backwards as if pushing away from something, made them seem stuck in a system, and chafing against it. While the piece rambled a bit in the middle section, it will be interesting to see it in the context of the complete work, due to premiere next fall.

Another standout of the evening was Robert Dekkers' duet *Interference Pattern* performed by him and Portland-based Patrick Kilbane. Dekkers, named one of *DANCE Magazine's* "25 to Watch" in 2011, presented a finely crafted work with impressive nuance. Crooked elbows, inverted knees, and repeated minute movements, like the turning in and out of one leg as if flipping a switch, were quirky details tucked into constantly shifting shapes. The wash of golden light created an eternal dusk onstage, and the video

projection of blinking orbs of light brought to mind the method by which astronomers discover planets orbiting distant stars: measuring when their light dims as the planet passes in front of it. This idea seemed to be echoed in the choreography as the two men initially moved in their own separate orbits, their shapes suddenly fitting together at center stage where a partnered section of pivots and slides ensued.

In a break from the modern dance aesthetic of the rest of the show, Chris Montoya, aka Doris Vidanya of Les Ballet Trockadero de Monte Carlo, displayed a fine example of classical ballet with the Act III Wedding variation of *Raymonda*. The Trocks, as the troupe is affectionately called, are famous for spoofing classical ballets by performing in drag with over-the-top camp. Vidanya fit the bill nicely with her orchid tutu and pointe shoes; she was simpering and effusive, but had the lofty ballon of a man.

Wade Madsen's premiere of *Manner Tanz* created a world of men acting like boys. Dressed in business suits, the goofy gestural movement showed them punching the clock and then breaking into robot-like wiggles and leapfrogging over each other. Not your typical day at the office, the piece is silly, light-hearted, and delightful to watch.



Sam Picart and Sean Rosado in *The Bella Pictures*.

Photo by Colleen Dishy

The two most classic modern pieces of the evening fell to Jason Ohlberg's *The Bella Pictures* (1997) and Deb Wolf's *Crash of Days*. Ohlberg's, danced by Sean Rosado and Sam Picart, was a tender portrait of a homosexual relationship set to the lush opera of Antonio Vivaldi. Danced with earnestness and grace, the two men rolled their spines while standing cheek to cheek, gently rough-housed, and sometimes completely bowled each other over with their affection. Wolf's hyper-masculine piece was quite opposite in tone. Two sculptures made of jumbled strips of metal bent at right angles, a macroscopic version of steel wool, hung above the stage. The movement and music were both reflective of the sculpture, filled with clanking metal noises and sharp angular motions. Both welders and pieces of metal themselves, the five men aggressively bit into the choreography, molding their bodies with defiance. Both Ohlberg and Wolf utilized a fairly standard modern dance vocabulary (weight sharing, rolls to the floor, and other familiar shapes) that brought little new to the table, but provided a successful articulation of their diverse themes.

What may have stolen the show, however, were the evening's youngest performers from Kaleidoscope Dance Company in *That's Why* (1996). Dedicated to the late Jesse Jaramillo, an original faculty member at Kaleidoscope who passed away this year, the work dealt with why young boys dance, the ridicule this sometimes creates, and why they do it anyway. Danced with unbridled freedom and joy, it was a portrait of kids just learning how to express themselves. Though the form is still coming, the passion for movement is already there, providing proof that the next generation of men in dance is well on its way.

Men In Dance continues next weekend with a whole new line-up. Tickets are available through Brown Paper Tickets.