

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Christopher Duggan

Untitled and Real

by Patricia Graham

I attended An Untitled Love, a dance choreographed by Kyle Abraham with my friend Warren Miller, a longtime dancer with Philadanco. As a solo artist, Warren has also toured and performed with a deep list of pioneering black choreographers including but not limited to: Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, Donald Byrd, Milton Meyers, George Faison, Louis Johnson, Bill T Jones. Although based on our dialogue, this article is presented in essay form.

Leaving the theater, Warren commented on how much he enjoyed the performance and I asked about his favorite aspect. What really stood out for him choreographically was Abraham's use of contrasting fast and slow movement speeds. In one glorious section, a group of dancers moved in exquisite slow motion, entering as individuals, and slowly becoming a protoplasmic force seeping across the stage. The dancers' ability with this pace of movement created a cinematic special-effect illusion, enhanced by lighting designer Dan Scully's use of side lighting.

Warren shared that the piece brought to mind a Spike Lee movie. It was full of storytelling, every-day and elevated, illuminating the many moments of attraction, insecurity, bravado, boredom, impatience, and passion that comprise romantic love - set to the music of R&B star D'Angelo. The dancers worked so well together that it seemed natural that they were a group of friends and acquaintances, experiencing life and relationships' struggles and joy. They shared a cultural context that included using text as well as dance. All the design elements worked together. The visual art by Joe Buckingham, which appeared in different iterations as painterly backdrops in the style of artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, put an Afro-centric embrace around the proceedings. A couch and accessories provided hominess and changes in lighting created a nightclub and at times the surprising contrast of a more abstract space within the story.

Abraham's movement vocabulary is a wonder of integration and versatility that maintained silky flow even with the more hard-hitting movements. Along with ballet and modern dance vocabularies, he wove in traditional African dance and breaking and locking. Warren pointed out that he also sampled movement from the martial art Capoirera and "Ball dancing" from the gay ballroom scene. Program notes credit both Abraham and his company of dancers – A.I.M. - with the choreography. Seeing the dancers' unique gifts so well utilized is one of the joys of this company in performance. There were many bright virtuosic moments throughout the piece.

Abraham included a short, recorded monologue expressing the anguish of a community that loves America but which receives death and fear in return. This shed a light on the solo dancer who appeared to be dancing through a landscape of internal struggle. He moved with tightness in his joints, resistance in his trunk and conflict in the marrow of his bones. Abraham's title reverberates. What name do you put on this love? How do you name all the nooks and crannies of love that he explored?

The action again swirled to the sweet spot at the center – the joyful power of this community.

Seeing Abraham and his drop-dead gorgeous company was a first for myself, Warren and many in the seasoned Philly dance audience. As one of Warren's friends put it, "Heard a lot about him, they probably not all that, but...they all that!"

Agreed.

[*An Untitled Love*](#), Kyle Abraham, Philadelphia Fringe Festival, Sept. 23-24

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