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Photo: Mark Garvin

## BODYTRAFFIC Serves Up a Robust Program

by Courtney Colón

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LA-based company [BODYTRAFFIC](#) demonstrated the versatility of its repertory and dancers with a full and varied program that included a world premiere. The bill, which contained four works from four choreographers, provided commentary on the opioid crisis, a love letter to Etta James, contemplation on radical resilience, and a slick Dean Martin moment.

*The One to Stay With*, created by the choreographic duo [Baye and Asa](#), is based on the book *Empire of Pain*; think a real-life version of the HBO series *Succession*, a rebuke of a greedy and powerful corporation that made millions in the pharmaceutical business and led to the current opioid epidemic. The piece opens with dancers gathered around a cauldron, lit white hot from the inside, staring intently at its contents with arms linked. Gazing at the resource that will make millions, perhaps? This question is never fully answered, as this particular prop is underused and only highlighted during the opening and at the end for a moment. This is a pet peeve of mine, props for prop's sake, not interwoven into the performance but separate, something pretty but not in partnership.

Thankfully, the dancing more than makes up for empty, half-done metaphors. The dancers, here clad in neutral green, blue, and gray tones, are exactly what you expect from BODYTRAFFIC; technically proficient and versatile. Staccato and creamy, individualistic or in large groupings, and always intense, the dancers utilize the entire stage as they slice through the air and show off dizzying pirouettes. Movement at first is chaotic, everyone a jumble of sharp and spasmodic limbs with no overarching structure. Eventually a dancer in white emerges and seems to oversee a change in the aesthetic to a more structured gait. The dancers come together and move as one, which is not as comforting as it would seem. Think gulag assembly line. Ultimately, they return to the pot, linked arms once again,

dropping water from above to abruptly finish the piece. *The One to Stay With* is impactful because its dancers are all forces of nature, but the choreographed elements here left something to be desired.

Trey McIntyre's *Blue Until June* continues his tradition of marrying popular music with balletic movement. In the same vein as his works using Beck and the [Beatles](#), here Etta James' music is the star, buoying choreography that is smart and sensuous. The staggering first image is of a solitary woman outfitted in a dark dress, voluminous skirt taking up the entire stage, obscuring dancers underneath. As each one emerges deliberate and constrained, they melt into the ebbs and flows of solos, duets, and small groups. Effortless partnering, intimate moments, and solid technique evoke that intrinsic despair that comes along with the blues, creating electrifying movement against James' agonizing vocals.

A world premiere of Philly's own Matthew Neenan, *I Forgot the Start*, takes the audience through seasons of joyfulness and grief to show us radical hope. The dancers are outfitted in icy blue costumes, see-through and light as clouds, evoking an incorporeality felt throughout the piece. The gorgeous, minimalist set by Christopher Ash deserves a nod here, with nature-inspired videos, crisp lighting, and rich amber pillars of varying heights that read as ritualistic. The dancing itself takes on a meditative quality, danced elegantly with movement that feels very of the now and working towards futurity. *I Forgot the Start* left me feeling introspective and was the piece I carried home.

The final piece of the night, *Pacopepepluto*, choreographed by Alejandro Cerrudo, is a signature work for the company and a fun end to the evening. Sensuous, silky smooth, and at times irreverent, *Pacopepepluto* is technique laid bare. Set to the sounds of the quintessentially cool Dean Martin with dancers outfitted in flesh-colored undergarments, the featured soloists displayed high-level technical virtuosity and artistry. The work could be a study on the anatomy of a dancer, the muscles obvious as each soloist danced for their own pleasure, carving shapes in the dim lighting, designed to drip off every sinew and piece of musculature onstage.

Each work in the program was distinctive, showing off BODYTRAFFIC's multifaceted identity and extensive artistic range. Set designs were crisp and lighting here operated exactly as it should, enhancing the dancing and deepening the stories. I left this performance excited for the company's future, and its use of choreographers, both tried and true and up and coming.

[BODYTRAFFIC](#), The Annenberg Center, January 19-20

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