

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Alexander Iziliaev

Great Xpectations

by Lisa Bardarson

The evening began with a new work by Adam Barruch. The dark tones of *If the Heart Runs* featured the full Ballet X company: William Cannon, Colby Damon, Chloe Felesina, Francesca Forcella, Zachary Kapeluck, Jaime Lennon, Caili Quan, Jesse Sani, Richard Villaverde and Andrea Yorita. An opening duet unfurled as though gravity did not exist, the dancers' fluid movements exquisitely intimate. A mist of fog drifting from the wings transported me to another dimension; I wondered if I was witnessing lovemaking in a different universe. My reverie was broken when two women traveled in unison across the back of the stage. The upright, linear energy of their duet created a pleasing contrast to the tangled movements of the first couple.

When larger groups of dancers formed, their movements felt disorganized and menacing. They lacked the sensual intimacy of the various couplings that emerged and dissolved throughout the work. In my mind they represented a disenfranchised working class, cold and distant. A dark score by Roarke Menzies created a dreary background. My need for story may have over-reached the intention of the dance: whether it intended to communicate a narrative idea wasn't entirely clear to me. Either way, the beautiful, luscious dancing of Ballet X's company members offered hope that connection and beauty can occur even in an unwelcoming environment.

On the other hand, *Heedful Needful* by Gabrielle Lamb, a work for six dancers, seemed very much about story—and a personal one at that. The program notes explained that the choreographer drew inspiration for the work from her own genealogy. The dancers were dressed in simple garments in soft, earthy tones that hinted at another era. One woman wore a gathered skirt and unadorned leotard that spoke "1950's schoolgirl." A man clad in shirt, pants and suspenders hinted at "Amish farmboy." Another, dressed in a below-the-knee cheongsam-style tunic stood out for me and the costume's timeless, sleek styling made me want to know more about this person. Was she a sophisticated great-great-aunt or was it Lamb taking her place on the family tree?

Each dancer committed to the choreography with the precision of an elocutionist, every movement enunciated perfectly and laden with meaning. Frustrated that I couldn't comprehend the dance's message or the connections between dancers, I wanted the strong emotional underpinnings of this work fleshed out more. I felt that I was receiving a mysterious cipher without enough information to crack the code. Without the program notes, I would have been at a loss to interpret this work; the title, although clever, offered no insight.

There I Was by Mathew Neenan capped the evening with a work for full company. A humorous start with the curtain raised about three feet, revealed eight sets of legs in workout garb. A goofy duet between a guitarist (dancer Colby Damon) and dancer (Chloe Felesina) introduced action just downstage of the partially-raised curtain. Costumed in a red cap and baggy clothes, Damon strummed, tremoloed and plucked his way through the evening with an impressive mix of classical and flamenco-style guitar and, at one point, spoke fluently in a language I didn't recognize. His talents are many and fun to watch and Neenan exploited them well. The dance was a valiant attempt at showing off the dancers but structurally, it felt haphazard to me. Neenan revealed in the program note that the dance began as an experiment intended to show off the dancers' best qualities. While this goal is admirable, I craved a stronger choreographic concept from which the dance could spring forth. In the meantime, if Damon isn't too busy practicing guitar or taking class, I'd love to know exactly what he said during the show.

Ballet X, Wilma Theater, November 20-24, 2013, 8pm. Balletx.org

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