

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Phile Deprez

The live-action version of every Judd Apatow movie: Still Standing You

by Annie Wilson

Pieter Ampe & Guilherme Garrido were already onstage as the audience entered the Painted Bride Wednesday night. Ampe lay on his back with his legs straight up in the air. Garrido sat on his extended feet, talking to the audience as they took their seats. He was cracking jokes. Not very funny jokes, like taking five minutes to introduce Ampe as his bro visibly strains underneath him. It's not unfunny because it's in any way cruel to the guy underneath, it's unfunny because we get the joke way before Garrido is finished telling it. I figured the jokes are so bad because he is, after all, primarily a dancer (you know what they say about dancers talking). I figured things would get a little less desperate once they started moving.

Holy shit was I wrong.

If you've ever been stuck at a party where two wasted dudes start doing some embarrassing clown show, one you are not allowed to not enjoy and definitely not allowed to not pay attention to, you've seen a version of this piece—a string of gags designed to elicit laughs or gasps of shock from the viewers, and not much more. These adult men felt permission to perform said gags with the maturity of seven-year olds, climbing on each other while pretending to be bears, wild cats, transformer dudes. Except, because they were like drunk guys, the animal imitations were sloppy and always followed by a look to us to see our reaction.

They even do this classic: one guy pinning the other down and threatening to spit on his head... really taking his time, letting the little ball of spit fall away from his mouth before sucking it up, or catching it at the last moment, or not. It doesn't matter which, because the audience has groaned in joyous disgust.

I want to tell people to stop laughing, you're only encouraging them.

Each new gag, whether it's an embarrassingly simple weight-sharing exercise, whipping each other with belts, or grabbing each others' dicks and twisting them multiple times over is so clearly a cry for attention that I start to truly pity them. If they were drunk guys at a party, I would think, "Oh no, those poor, deeply insecure men so uncomfortable with their masculinity. They are embarrassing themselves instead of actually dealing with what's going on."

Except these guys aren't drunk and uncomfortable. They know exactly the material they are working with. There is definite attention paid to the way aggression slips into intimacy slips into play slips into fraternal bonding. And this replay and regurgitation is *still* the best they could do.

Listen, I almost shit myself laughing when James Franco kicked his foot through the windshield of a car in *Pineapple Express*. I was touched when Paul Rudd and Seth Rogen did mushrooms together in *Knocked Up*. I can get down with a bromance. And I love non-narrative work. But just because this work was non-narrative doesn't mean it wasn't formulaic.

Halfway through I recognize Ampe's superman underwear and something clicks in my head. I realize I've seen this piece before, five years ago, in Berlin. I don't recall being so embarrassed back then, in fact I remember I kind of enjoyed the piece. What's different now? Is it because in 2010 the piece was set against a festival of cool cerebral European dance? Is it because last week I saw Underground Railroad Game use a naked penis to *actually say something*? Or because I saw Miguel Gutierrez dance with a dude's dick *in his mouth* a few years ago? Or maybe because I've seen Almanac's *Communitas* deal with similar ideas around masculine aggression, intimacy, and friendship to much more powerful effect? Or Team Sunshine Performance Corporation's work, which swirls entirely around the tension between the desire for male emotional intimacy and the anxiety of adequately performing hetero masculinity? Has this piece changed, or is it my understanding of nudity, shock-in-art, and masculinity that has evolved?

Two moments stood out in relief to the rest of the piece: one where Garrido is carrying Ampe like a tired child, and scratches a heart onto his bare back, the other at the end. Perhaps because they were sweaty and tired enough. Maybe because they had been naked long enough to be comfortable. Maybe because their desperate desire for laughs from the audience had *finally* been satiated. Garrido ends up on Ampe's back, grasping his ass as Ampe comes into a downward facing dog. Both of their faces are turned from the audience. They lower to the ground. They are lying, face to ankle. Garrido kisses Ampe's foot. They roll up and down the stage. Up and down the stage. Then get up, hold hands, and bow. As if the last Bud Light Lime had worn off and they were finally humans again.

Still Standing You, Pieter Ampe & Guilherme Garrido, Painted Bride Arts Center, September 9, 10, and 11.

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