

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation

Editor's Note: January Roundup

TD's writers spent January's first Tuesday get-together taking stock and thinking about the way forward. In small groups we considered issues related to community, conversation, writing and whatever else arose.

Connected to writing, people voiced the wish to write longer pieces, to take more time, to have more 'free form' discussion and peer critique, and to stretch beyond the Philadelphia borders and beyond familiar contexts into less 'journalistic' writing.

Regarding the community, there's concern that we more clearly articulate our goals and objectives, clarify how we are similar to and different from other publications, and understand and speak to the expectations of the community.

Related to conversation, the group is interested in inviting the public into our sessions more going forward and hosting more open talks.

Some possible "action items" for the future are: a "conversation review" where several writers are recorded speaking together about something they've seen, a more informal blog connected to the site where writers could stretch out and write in a very personal way, a Performance Club on the model of what Claudia La Rocco leads in NY where a self-selected group goes to a show and convenes afterward at a café to talk it over, and creating with media like video, slideshows and podcasts.

We're pleased that a bunch of artists have been using our pieces in their promotional materials and that University classes have been making use of our reviews. Next month Anna will share the google analytics data for the site with the group and we can report on that then.

Our first months have raised important questions about writing responsibly. With Elizabeth Zimmer we studied the document "Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Start to Write About a Performance" compiled for the Dance Critics Association by Deborah Jowitt, Marcia Siegel, and Zimmer. For the January meeting we prepared a related document to help us reflect on another relevant area. It's printed below.

Questions to Ask re: Bias, Conflict of Interest and Cultural Sensitivity

Bias

Do I already have strong feelings about this work or its aesthetics prior to viewing? If so, how can I open to what is presented and write about it from a place of respect, without coloring the writing from the outset with my view?

If I am aware of a bias, how can it make me more inquisitive and responsible? How can I present a cogent reasoning for why I have the feeling/opinion that I have, based on what was shown, minimizing generalizations, snark and potshots? How can I be forthright about my own leanings, claiming them as my own when appropriate?

Conflict of Interest

Do I have a prior or existing relationship with this artist or their work (monetary, as a colleague or socially) that will color, or be seen to color how I write or edit this piece? If so is that sufficient to necessitate recusing myself from writing/editing at all? If I do write/edit, how can I appropriately disclose that relationship and/or recognize the tendency to approach it in a special way (favorable or not) based on

the relationship?

Am I in competition with this person (for funds, space, dancers)? Does that color my take on their work?

If there is a potential conflict of interest, might there be a more appropriate format for the writing than a review?

Cultural Sensitivity

Does the content of this piece potentially perpetuate racial/cultural stereotypes? Are any unfounded generalizations made about this kind of dancing or culture?

Is the dance form regarded on its own terms, or alternately is the lens through which the writer is seeing made explicit?

Am I certain that all factual information regarding diverse styles, cultures and traditions is correct? If not, can I do further research or amend my language to minimize errors?

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As ever, we welcome your thoughts in the form of comments or Letters to the Editor.

By Lisa Kraus

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