thINKingDANCE
Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation

Photo: Daniel Kontz

Seafaring Brilliance

by Patricia Graham

To experience an ideal piece of physical theater, check out Almanac Dance Circus Theater's *Leaps of Faith and Other Mistakes*; sublime in so many ways.

The cast—Nicole Burgio as Wentoba, Nick Gillette as Kent, Ben Grinberg as Javier and Adam Kerbel as Clavis—embark on a voyage to "start a new world together." They can do it—they have a boat (a grey/green tired-but-sturdy couch) and most importantly, they are committed to their cause. The struggle to maintain that commitment is the theme of this piece, played out with delicious artfulness and humor through the highs and lows of their adventure.

Director Annie Wilson worked with Almanac to re-imagine this work, determined to center the piece's expression on the body. The cast members share a high degree of acrobatic skill, with a vocabulary of extreme flips, jumps, and original configurations of supported holds. When Kerbel balances in an impossibly high inversion on Grinberg's extended hands, he doesn't slide or hop off in a dismount. Instead Grinberg slowly lowers him, elevator fashion, down to earth. Although the vocabulary is filled with virtuosic tricks—lots of gasps in the audience—it functions in many ways, illuminating the environment of sea and sky, developing the characters' relationships, and driving the narrative forward.

Almanac and Wilson combine the theatrical elements with the same clear-sighted attention to the whole. There is just enough text to satisfy without clouding the physicality. The white outfits with varying black lines show character in a gently humorous way, and the high-ceilinged gallery space at the Painted Bride both emphasizes the soaring movement and provides shoebox-like containment.

The space becomes an important character in the piece, as does the one-woman sound score performed live by Mel Hsu. Multi-instrumentalist Hsu finds the right melodies, sounds, and textures for each scene, utilizing her skills on cello and vocals, with added

percussion instruments and electronic looping.

What pulls on my heart is that they have something to say. An intrepid voyage into the unknown is a metaphor that works for many endeavors, including a Circus/Dance troupe operating in a country that often seems to care little for its artists. How does one nurture commitment over time, whether to a new romance (alluded to in the show) or any adventure? How do they survive clueless enthusiasm, tea instead of food, day after day at sea, sex among the crew members, and moments of insanity without going off course?

Pay attention and you'll catch it.

Leaps of Faith and Other Mistakes, Almanac Dance Circus Theatre, Painted Bride Art Center, September 9-13, 15-19, 21-23, fringearts.com/event/leaps-faith-mistakes/

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