

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Plate 3 Photography

Twins on a Mission

by Patricia Graham

In anticipation of catching *An Evening of Duets* concert at the Community Education Center by six different choreographers, I wondered about the form itself. What does the presence of two bodies sharing a space imply?

In *The Arrangement* choreographer Tara Madsen Robbins cuts through my mental debris with her refreshingly sharp, minimal choreography. Christine Michener and Priscilla Tillotson perform this to a “T”—dancing in unison, without a single shared look, stepping forward, shifting weight, arm gesturing almost a punch. They catch a rhythmic wave and ride it together. Their relationship to each other in space – staggered and mostly facing us head on – remains hypnotically constant. We’re synced up with them through the stream of movement. They loop through the sequence, repeating and varying; twins on a mission. Hooray...it sets my evening on its ear.

1096 is a standout collaboration between flamenco artist Elba Hevia y Vaca of the Pasion y Arte Company and modern dance artist KC Chun-Manning of Fresh Blood Company.

Hevia y Vaca stands with her back to us and Chun--Manning sits close to her on the floor. Drummer Matthew Fenwick sings a dark song with his djembe; the resonating sound travels down my spine. Chun--Manning sinks and spirals lower, pooling behind Hevia y Vaca’s legs, then climbing, foot by foot, up her back to end with one foot on the proud flamenco queen’s upper spine. I hold my breath. They stay there long enough for us to experience the unconventionality of the image that marries both the flamenco and modern dance sensibilities. The artists conduct an exploratory dialogue between these worlds, influencing each other. Chun-Manning holds her fingers in pointed bull horns and responds to the growing intensity of Hevia y Vaca’s stamping, clapping circles with her own gathering storm. The boundaries between the two blur. Are they creating a third language?

Loosening the conventional presentation of these genres frees us to see and think differently. The question of women’s power and the roles they take on swirls through this piece but doesn’t overshadow the work’s thorny heartbeat intensity. Looking forward to the full

presentation of *1096* in the PIFA festival at the Kimmel Center, April 5-7.

In *Sensus*, another take on dialogue emerges through exaggerated head-craning and torso-angulating postures. Choreographer Eleanor Goudie-Averill draws two business-suited characters with distinct personalities. Are they just disagreeing or playing the power game? Melissa Chisena's suit dances her around, amusingly. She fronts, with ultra chest lifting and stylized hand gestures. Scott McPheeters is on the receiving end of Chisena's alpha dog, submitting to a slap and her supercilious posturing. *Sensus* is a crowd pleaser, with its hyper-real characters and chiseled ending. I wonder about the ways this rich material could be mined beyond the agree-disagree plot line.

The CEC vibrates with live music and devotion to the rigors of dance. Cheers to Chisena, for curating a coherent and fresh concert, as well as choreographing and performing in two of the pieces.

My question about duets continues, in musing on the spectrum of relationships and the particularity of dance to explore them through space and time. The challenge for many of the program's choreographers is to define their own voices without being caught up in the conventions of their finely honed technique.

An Evening of Duets, Community Education Center, February 8-9, 2013. No further performances.

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March 7, 2013