

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: JH Kertis

Endurance, Chaos, and the Rigor of Attention

By Kat J. Sullivan

Vervet Dance's *In the Light* series is as much about endurance as it is spontaneous composition. I saw the autumnal iteration, one of the longest yet, as part of the Philly Fringe. For just about 13 hours, the minute from sunrise to sunset, Loren Groenendaal (artistic director of the company) and other performers at The Iron Factory composed in the moment with each other, the audience, and the transitory light of the sun. The small sliver that I caught was an endurance challenge of my own: how to stay present during the ever-shifting landscape.

This is one of the beautiful things about improvisation-as-performance and of Vervet's score: rigorous commitment is as much a responsibility of the audience members as it is the performers. Paying attention to the moment helps to shape it and, as the performance notes articulated, "there is no wrong way to perceive this work." As a performer, this commitment took many forms: dancing, playing an instrument, sitting or lying down, resting in the downstairs apartment. (Groenendaal encouraged the performers to practice self-care throughout the long-format score.) As an audience member, the act is to witness and make sense. When I first entered the space, two performers were scooting themselves around the wooden pillar in the middle of the studio space, two more were rolling an orange-colored ball back and forth, and others played instruments like a saxophone, washboard, or drum closer to the back wall. A performer lay on the floor, next to the keyboard, appearing to nap.

I found the moments of synchronicity and pattern a respite amidst the frenzy. In one such moment, performer Curt Hayworth lay on his back with his legs bent, kicking off the floor and waving through his spine, legs landing on the hardwood in a thump that fell into sync with other dancers' insistent drum beats. Later, the performers left the stage after piling disparate items onto an air mattress, leaving us to take in the concocted tableau, minus moving bodies.

Witnessing even a piece of this long form improvisation warped my perception of time - an hour felt like it had melted down to five

minutes by the time I left. Considering the implications of this on the dancers' perception of 13 hours, added another layer to my musings about this resonant and fruitful performance.

In the Light, Vervet Dance, The Iron Factory, Sept. 15, fringearts.com/event/in-the-light/.

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