

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: J Makary

A Bicycle Built for Everyone

By Amelia Longo

I love that there are always kids in the audience when I see Green Chair Dance Group. On a professional level, I'm excited that they're building new audiences for dance. I imagine Young Friends receptions with juice boxes and the chance to join in the onstage antics. In the back of the theatre, parents decorously nibble on Animal Crackers while scribbling out checks. (Having worked in development, I am haunted by bizarre ideas for fundraising events.) On a more practical level, I'm just glad there's a part of the audience fearlessly enjoying itself. And that I'm not the only one laughing too loud and too long. But on Friday night at the Annenberg Center, it seemed everyone in the full house found moments to giggle.

A mini Snickers taped to a note of welcome adorned each seat in the Harold Prince Theatre. The homey set consisted of a line of stacked radiator covers strewn with figurines, globes, and other knick-knacks. Dancers Sarah Gladwin Camp, Hannah de Keijzer, and Gregory Holt entered the stage in jeans and button-downs in various shades of blue and moved through a brief phrase on the floor. "That was our favorite phrase, so we put it first," Holt announced to audience chuckles, setting the tone for the entire piece in a brief, well, phrase.

I don't tend to like spoken text in dance, but theirs consistently invited the audience in, rather than feeling overly performative. Natural and pseudo-narrative, it brought to mind stand-up comedy or maybe story-telling clowns, miming larger-than-life the understated movements and emotions occurring elsewhere on or off stage. The constant interaction with the audience served to include us in what otherwise could have been a very insular topic: the dancers' relationships with one another. Green Chair Dance Group showed a charming ability to connect with its viewers and make us feel like we were part of the show: that they were there for us, just like they are there for each other.

The dancers continued to announce titles of sections (such as “We are Reasonable People,” “We are Luscious People,” and “We are Desperate People”) and to narrate each other’s movement, most of which did not occur at the time of narration – a bit confusing, but also an interesting matching game of words with later movements. They told stories about the dance and about their feelings surrounding it. One address reminded me of the “Stars are Just Like Us” pages of popular magazines: *They like games! They have sensitive skin!* And I wasn’t alone – during the post-show talkback, a Brazilian man enamored with the Capoeira influences he found was actually shocked that Gladwin Camp was not herself Brazilian.

Green Chair threw in a nice dose of bittersweet to balance the humor. After the dancers piled themselves up, one atop another, de Keijzer asked, “Sarah, do you think we’re close?” Gladwin Camp replied “Yes” in a moment both simple and endearing; de Keijzer then leaned back against Gladwin Camp’s face. Later, Holt leapt into de Keijzer’s arms, and Gladwin Camp walked off stage. She returned comically over-bundled in winter gear to tell us how she first felt about their duet, “not quite déjà vu, but like binoculars backwards.” In a group consisting of three members, any pastime for two could be dangerous, but Green Chair made it clear that they’ve learned how to take care of one another, physically and emotionally.

Scuttling across the floor, the dancers worked to fit into each other like puzzle pieces. The “favorite phrase” repeated in constantly changing costumes (beachwear, winter gear, and even gold lame) was a recurring delight. De Keijzer paused for a face dance involving nuanced grimaces and grins, to one particular child’s clear amusement – mini snickers punctuated the whole sequence. But overall, the movement – often floorbound, gestural, or posing – seemed secondary. Not to the text, or even to the process, but to their playfulness and their desire to connect with us in the audience. We were all along for the ride.

Tandem Biking and Other Dangerous Pastimes for Two, Green Chair Dance Group, Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, Feb 3-4.
No further performances.

By Amelia Longo
February 21, 2012