

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Bill Hebert

Home for the Holidays

by Lisa Bardarson

What does the phrase “Home for the holidays” mean to you? For many of us it involves gathering with family and friends to celebrate the traditions that take place during these cold, dark days of winter. And when it comes to dance in December, we are likely to conjure up the dancing treats found in the ubiquitous renditions of *The Nutcracker*. For those of us lucky enough to be gathered at Group Motion’s *Spiel Uhr* dance series and 45th anniversary celebration at the Community Education Center, there were traditions of a different kind to be found. The evening featured nine works of family, company, and friends.

Let’s start with the four family members presenting: Group Motion’s director, Manfred Fischbeck, co-founder, Brigitta Herrmann and their two daughters, Laina Fischbeck and Aura Fischbeck, offered dances ranging from funny to sublime.

“Liberty” by Aura Fischbeck is a work-in-progress. When the lights came up, they revealed Fischbeck center stage dressed in Statue of Liberty garb, replete with battery-powered lamp. The opening tableau deserved the laughs it received, but I was disappointed that the movement and motivation for the dance didn’t live up to its costuming. I hope the San Francisco-based Fischbeck returns to the *City of Brotherly Love* as her Lady Liberty shows loads of promise.

Herrmann’s dance, “about CHOICE,” was a brilliant example of commitment in improvisation. I was inspired to see an artist of maturity moving with such clarity and humor. Her nuanced movement choices shaped by her use of breath convinced me at every turn. Because Herrmann was so present in each moment, I understood her journey. As a sculptor reveals the statue within the marble, so Herrmann revealed the motivation within the dance.

Laina Fischbeck and co-collaborator Johan Charpentier, who are based in France, had me in stitches throughout their piece “Duo or Die.” Fischbeck provided a slew of characters that included three outrageous swans (the white, black, and dying kind) and a really

mean chanteuse. Charpentier also created a neurotic partner with an obsessive-compulsive fixation to intensely count, "Un Deux Trois" with each footfall across the stage. His numbered steps became all the more ridiculous when he peeled off a layer of clothing leaving him clad in a black body stocking; his fervent piano accompaniment further punctuated his oddball character. This daughter of Fischbeck/Herrmann and her partner committed themselves to the moment with verve in this very silly dance.

Darcy Lyons' dance, "Safekeeping," featured performers and collaborators Mason Rosenthal, Grace Stern, Stuart Meyers and Lisa Rothstein. Whether they were defending a position or preparing to flee wasn't always clear, but as the dance progressed, its prescient theme was revealed with shocking clarity. "Safekeeping" was investigating fears both real and imagined, and the impact of its content was heightened by the massacre that took place at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut the day before.

"Don't let a kiss fool you," an enchanting duet by David Konyk, used the over-sized windows of the theater to great effect. Konyk and Hedy Wyland reached, pulled, jumped, and slid in their adjacent windows, creating an amuse-bouche for the eye while the music of Glenn Miller and Tom Waits created a smoky backdrop. The only elements missing in this sultry dance were the gin martinis.

Capping the evening off was "Tableaux," directed by Group Motion's leader Manfred Fischbeck. Company members Lindsay Browning, Eleanor Goudie-Averill, Konyk and Wyland executed this structured improvisation with an exuberant appetite for exploration that is one of the hallmarks of Fischbeck's vision. As stated in the company's mission statement: "Each dance becomes a world of its own, transforming the stage into a ritual space to explore life's mysteries and journeys." Group Motion's 45-year legacy is a testament to this philosophy.

Spiel Uhr Group Motion, Community Education Center, December 15-16. www.groupmotion.org

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