

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Johanna Austin

Group Motion Meets Olive Prince Dance at a Juncture

by Becca Weber

Group Motion Multi Media Dance Theater recently celebrated their 45-year history with an evening of dance aptly titled *Juncture*. Co-presented with Olive Prince Dance, the performances presented works both old and new, contrasting athleticism with abstraction, seriousness with humor.

Prince's *Twine* opened the evening as audience members directed red and white-tinted flashlight beams at a writhing Liz Reynolds downstage. Soon, she was joined by three other dancers, who whipped and swished their flouncy, royal blue skirts with scattered pintucks, and picked and pulled at dark tops accented with lace. The dancers displayed perfectly-honed technique in repeated moves: graceful attitude turns, long arabesques, supple falls to the floor, the occasional fan kick. Never was there an errant limb or vaguely-directed focus; the dancers performed with clarity and a sense of purpose.

The impulse driving that purposefulness, though, was never clear in the structure of the work. The seamlessness of their skill was unsupported by the choreography. Sections of the work ended abruptly; awkward transitions peppered the piece. There were too many elements--the flashlights, the fancy costumes, some sophisticated partnering, a range of popular music crashing against driving electronic beats, and a speaking section where dancers verbalized their movement directions--yet none seemed to connect to the others. I was left feeling unaffected by their emotiveness, confused and slightly overwhelmed at trying to piece together so many disparate parts.

A beautiful duet between Prince and Jen Rose unfolded as other dancers simultaneously strung pieces of thin, white cord horizontally across the stage. The partnering was carefully constructed so that the intruding rope never obscured or confounded their pathways. In a piece titled *Twine*, it was somewhat disappointing that these elements never wove together. I certainly appreciated the dancers'

impeccable athleticism, but it left me confronting my own desires for art that is more than aesthetically pleasing.

No sooner had I considered this preference than Brigitta Herrmann's *I jumped into some animal's throat* made the leap into more abstract dance theatre. Herrmann emitted low, guttural moaning and squealing yelps seated from a bench, facing upstage. Her torso wrenched and wriggled in a black trench coat: I could not resist recalling Martha Graham's [Lamentation](#). The piece progressed slowly; movement and vocalizations repeated. I wondered if audience members who appreciated Prince's athleticism would find this piece arduous? Herrmann disrobed, shedding layers of the coat and a white tunic, and appeared in flowing black robes. Eventually joined by Hedy Wyland and Kristin Narcowich, the trio twirled like dervishes in long black skirts to eerie choir music, the spooky image invoking witchery--perhaps an homage to Herrmann's teacher, Mary Wigman's [Hexentanz](#) (*Witch Dance*)?

Manfred Fischbeck's Group Motion closed the evening with two older works from 1992/93. The program notes that both *Inroads* and *Visitors (At Cafe Edge)* share themes of travel, arrival and departure. *Inroads* situated these themes within a community. The company moved in unison, stomping foot patterns, individuals breaking away and then being swept up by the group. Stark, beautiful projections by John Luna set the backdrop: a brick wall, a window, a telephone wire. Then, as the dancers' phrasing slowed, the images aflame, burning away. In his video, small bits of ash floated down as dancers mimicked each other's gestures and created tableaux featuring group "takes" on an individual's stance. Though many dancers are new to the company, they gave the impression of a close-knit collective, intuiting their own timing and direction. They were *listening* to each other in movement—a simple bond that made the entire piece compelling to watch.

In contrast, in *Visitors (At Cafe Edge)*, the performers were a tad wobbly, perhaps nervous on opening night with a difficult piece. It had a humorous take, with audiences directed to turn off their cell phones, and turn on their extra sensory perception. Guillermo Ortega Tanus opened the scene as a poet in a cafe's open-mic night. He was joined by a lounge singer (Lindsay Browning), a CEO on her mobile (Ellie Goudie-Averill), and a disillusioned, overworked waitress (Hedy Wyland), who each delivered a quippy monologue, complaining of the humdrum normativity of their life. Their desires to escape the daily doldrums were fulfilled when five alien "visitors" descended upon, and abducted, our hosts.

As fog filled the stage the group returned, donning space-age grey filmy pantsuits atop nude body suits; captors danced in duets or trios with abductees, crawling and climbing on each other in entwined phrases and dramatic lifts. The piece ended with the café inhabitants returning to their original places, singing cacophonously over each other as the visitors advanced upon the audience. Tanus' last utterance rang out: "Are you ready for someone or something to take you away?"

Juncture, presented by Group Motion Multi Media Dance Theater and Olive Prince Dance. The Performance Garage, April 25-27, 2013.

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