

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Alan DiBerio

Bridging Choreographers with ZIPLINE

By Debbie Shapiro

Zip-wires serve as makeshift bridges transporting people over rivers in remote mountainous areas. The metaphor worked well in the context of *ZIPLINE Weekend One*, a recent series of new works by eight emerging and seasoned female choreographers, presented by Settlement Music School, Meredith Lyons, and Eleanor Goudie-Averill/Stone Depot Dance Lab.

Girls in T-shirts were holding hands in the alcove of the Performance Garage when I rushed in to take my seat. This pre-show act was gone in a flash, and I would have taken them for audience members had their tank tops not been stitched together, connecting them at the chest.

The first act on the actual stage was a prelude serenade of Spanish guitar by Settlement teacher Luke Honer. Then Jennifer Kayle, one of the evening's choreographers, entered and delivered what can best be described as a curtain speech performance.

Her highly animated spoken word improvisation set the tone for the next work, *Of a Substance Insoluble*, a solo performed by Jenny Gram and choreographed by Kayle. The work favored a demonstration of technique and training (pointed toes, lovely extensions, and balanced turns), but Kayle chose to forgo the musical quality that changes beautiful lines from still shots to fluid movement. Gram's choppy yet controlled phrases used lunges and arabesques to take full advantage of the stage's terrain, and were punctuated by anxious head shakes, as if the dance in its entirety was a surrender to some external force. Whatever the struggle, it wasn't taking place in the room with us, for Gram's gaze throughout shot far beyond the back wall. The gradually building, ambient soundtrack, by Sheila Chandra, added a semblance of tension to the piece.

A change in temperature followed in *FORWARD afterward*, a playful proposal about collaboration in choreography from Meredith

Lyons, Annie Kloppenberg, and Rachel Boggia. The creators billed the work as “choreography by consensus before your eyes,” and entered the space together donning rehearsal clothes. They delivered what they promised—no easy task, especially with the rules of their practice: no music, no talking (save a few giggles), learn what I just did, add material, take it from the top, repeat. The result: a no-frills, but satisfying little phrase of embodied movement (featuring a semi-head stand), with enough variation to prove the trio’s sharp ability to improvise while watching and to memorize instantly.

The third piece, *Wrestling with Actualities, which so far have resisted mathematical treatment*, another from Kayle, was the first of the evening to combine text with dancing. Featuring Eleanor Goudie-Averill and Edward Rice, this duet included a powerful recitation of phrases, like fictional Chinese proverbs (“Denial is the decision to conceal the facts from your own eyes”). Repeated lines of the text, building in intensity, drove the movement: a clean, modern vocabulary. The addition of a choreographed rolling office chair suggested the piece be viewed as a trio. The idea of a struggle returned (like *Substance*), but this version depicted true force, anger, and even self-punishment, with Goudie-Averill repeatedly slamming her back on the ground as in a wrestling match.

barrish by Sarah A. O. Rosner raised the stakes in terms of choreographic inquiry, surprise, and depth, and was performed by Anna Adams Stark, Leah Ives, Emily Skillings & Ilona Bito. The four entered the pillow-lined space one at a time, on hands and knees, clunking their shins to the ground with dragging crawls. What followed were many seemingly disconnected sections, including a theatrical reading of a *Law & Order* episode, a powerfully muted solo, and a return of the connected tank tops (except this time used as fascinating props when pulled apart). The work concluded with a cutting monologue by Anna Adams Stark and a kiss between Stark and Bito. One might describe *barrish* as a shameless, feminist, homoerotic anxiety dream performance, but it was also a poetic dance.

FOREWARD afterward returned to the stage, this time described as “composition by consent in the back room.” A now-costumed Lyons, Kloppenberg, and Boggia performed a new dance, a clear elaboration of the phrase made earlier, set to music, and completely worked out, for a polished finale.

These pieces sat well together, and the evening’s pace felt right, building momentum through each. The collaboration of local first-time presenters and visiting artists was refreshing and welcome. I was glad to have caught a ride on this “zipline,” and left eager to hear about *ZIPLINE Weekend Two*, featuring a separate lineup from the same curators.

ZIPLINE Weekend One, Premiering the Works of 8 Emerging & Seasoned Female Choreographers, presented by Settlement Music School, Meredith Lyons and Eleanor Goudie-Averill/Stone Depot Dance Lab at the Performance Garage, May 10-11

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