

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Bill Hebert

Sonorous Continuing

By Patricia Graham

“It was a good program – everything melded well together.”*

Crowd-sourcing post-show brings plenty of like-minded comments – pleased audience members reflect with pleasure on the overall well-curated show and the merits of individual pieces. I’ve seen “experimental” music shows before that featured extended instrumental noodling – not my favorite. This concert carries through with a sense of purpose. Where does the sound/vision continuum begin, end, and interact? I find myself within that continuum throughout the evening, enjoying four different works with four unique approaches to this collaborative question.

“A piece about the symbolic forms that noise takes.”

Yes, and then some. This explanation and other tightly-wound wordiness in the program notes don’t take us inside the multi-tiered vision of artist Drake Z. Tyler, but his work gets the job done. I keep re-reading his statement, enjoying the work in retrospect and marveling that Tyler did realize his abstract vision.

“The artist really pulled it together by involving the audience.”

Tyler’s monologue takes us through a list of instructions for the performers (or maybe all of us) within a montage of hyper-verbosity. The other three elements of the work, Bill Rich’s drums, Jeff Monjack’s guitar, and Colleen Hooper’s dancing find balanced integrity in their interactions, each contributing a tasty layer. Hooper creates a repeating structure of movement and attenuated stillness that pull us to her – whether she is in a slump or an eyes-covered arabesque. Her choreography provides contrast to the text and music, and at times

she seems to function as an abstract particle in this environment. Rich and Monjack work a range of textural explorations as well: Rich multi-tasks on bass drum and hi-hat while gently using the sticks in different patterns on the rims, Monjack speaks in delicate electric guitar language. They end with my favorite direction: "Initiate a process that you quickly lose control of" – a lovely falling apart ensues.

"There was an eyeball shape and all these little televisions that go crazy."

Even though I was late and missed the fantastic eyeball-shaped beginning of *Antarctica*, a media opera by musician Mikronesia with choreographer Nora Gibson and lighting designer Clifford Greer, I saw enough to be eagerly awaiting the full-length production, to premiere in 2015 in a planetarium format theater. The dreamy-groovy textures of *Antarctica* mix a live electronic and vocal performance, sung by Steve Quaranta, in company with video. The video is projected onto three panels of diaphanous hanging fabric, contributing to said dreaminess in a starlit way. I see bar codes and other digitalized signs of life fractured and multiplied as well as dancers performing ballet moves. The dancers' images are gently manipulated in ways that warp our time and space relationship with the dancing body. Choreographer Nora Gibson comments that in working with the ballet vocabulary, a traditional form, contemporary relevance is always on her mind, asking "what is ballet now, as we go into the twenty-first century?" An insiders' secret: the screen material is the traditional filmy fabric of ballet – tulle, from Gibson – adding a subversive depth to the holographic images.

Drummer flanelle fleisenberg and dancer/choreographer Loren Groenendaal share the activity of making their piece *Drums for Dance/Dance for Drums*. They begin at the end, unwinding from a final high five, and end at the beginning, enacting their greeting to each other and leaving the space. In between, we slowly accumulate the anatomy of their dialogue. The title is an accurate description of the piece and their mutual interest and absorption of each others' work is a compelling element. The audience seems to appreciate the time reversal trick with appreciative chuckles at the end.

"I'm struck by how masculine and strong, tall and powerful she is."

Megan Bridge packs a punch in her continually focused movement improvisation with musician Peter Price, the other half of their long term collaboration: fidget. The score evolves from a recording of children's voices into predominantly electronic sounds that seem to overtake Bridge through shaking, trembling and monster walk movement. With a shift in the score, she embodies a ghostly remnant of the movement theme, concentration never flagging. Ending, she retraces her entrance pathway, diverging momentarily into small circles that bubble up through her feet.

Sonorous Continuum show was part of fidget's Fourth Annual Fall Experimental Music Festival which also featured thingNY's whispered opera – *this takes place close by* - as well as five hours of performance and discussion curated by DJ King Britt, *Bring the Noise: Afrofuturism & the Art of Noise Manifesto*. The show had integrity and a sense of purpose, uncovering new configurations of sound and vision in dialogue with each other. I felt enriched and unplugged from whatever screen I had been unknowingly over-plugged into. Very cool.

*Comments in quotes gathered through conversation with audience members after the show. "A piece about the symbolic forms that noise takes" is from the program notes by Drake Z. Tyler.

Sonorous Continuum, FIDGET 4th Annual Fall Experimental Music Festival, Nov. 9, 2013, 1714 N. Mascher St., www.thefidget.org

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November 20, 2013