

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Kathryn Raines

Alone, Together

by Becca Weber

As I enter the Mount Vernon Dance Space, I see dancer John Luna on the floor, holding a camera whose black and white images project onto the ceiling. Chairs are placed around the perimeter of the room. Relieved at not having to choose, I take a seat on the side where two chairs are marked for me.

My gaze keeps shifting upwards to that projection. I am watching the room, but also not watching the room. Many people enter without my seeing them until later. This is how *Onliest* reads to me: both as part of a group, a community, and yet all alone.

The space is set with light trees and a cluster of objects: rods, balls, a pot. Red screens obstruct my view of other audience members. I comment to my partner that it's a lovely space, but one that is difficult to transform. Choreographer Curt Haworth directs PARD, the performance and class series at Mt. Vernon; I can tell he knows the space intimately as he uses it to its fullest from the moment he and the other dancers emerge around us. Gabrielle Giordano sits on the floor near me; instrumentalist Julius Masri appears across the room. Bethany Formica curls up under a pew while Khadija Ahmaddiya stretches atop. I cannot take in everyone at once—instead, they appear, like constellations that join the white noise of the night sky, as soon as my gaze drifts.

Masri's soundscore throughout the piece is interactive—the dancers grab tubes, drumsticks, chains, and play. Masri scratches a key on the floor, its tones still reverberating as Haworth perches atop him, their arms mimicking writing on the ground. Metal balls whiz through the space, their pitch growing and dissolving as they approach and pass my seat.

The sound is kinetic—both how it is made, and how it plays out in the dancers' bodies. Haworth and Grieger dance a swirling duet, tremors of the score traveling through their bodies as they spiral in and out of the floor. Later, the ensemble restructures the space and I

struggle to hear snippets of text from behind the screens the dancers push past me: “I was walking,” “Just beyond my reach.” I wonder if others can make out more.

Masri’s silhouette appears, lit from below, as he is ensconced in the enclave the dancers built of screens. We see snippets of his arms through shadows on the ceiling, as scratching, clunky sounds and knocking percussion fill the space. Only Masri knows fully what lies within the screens’ enclosure.

Moments of connection happen: Masri plays a speedy drum solo as Grieger attempts to stop him, but he is steadfast. Eventually, she lifts him over one shoulder, hoists the drum set on the other, and walks off. Formica and Grieger dance a duet around an awkward handshake. It winds down with the two lying supine, Formica atop Grieger. They adjust, over and over, with Formica always on top. Between small solos and duets, the entire cast appears in the space. But these connections are always short-lived, never definitive. When the cast is all together, they are still apart—no contact, no acknowledgement of each other—in a world together, but worlds apart. I get the sense of planets, orbiting the same sun but never meeting.

As Luna’s projection of white wintry birch trees is divided, half on the ceiling, half on the ceiling fans hanging below it, I hear Haworth: “I was walking alone in the woods one day....” Earlier, Formica’s resonant monologue, delivered from her place on a ledge above the audience, spoke of a solitary ritual, watching credit cards sink and drift away in the ocean. These two moments emphasized the performer’s maturity, which was inevitably lacking in some of the younger dancers, reminding me again that we are all on our own journeys, at different places along the path.

In our ThINKingDANCE workshop on Sunday, Haworth’s partner, Nicole Bindler, brought in a [review of the show from her perspective](#). We were at the same performance; our experiences were similar. Words landed in me that brought back the evening. And yet it was different. What was backlit for her was plainly visible for me. What I struggled to see (lifting my hand to my eyes at one point, blocking the rays to glimpse the action), was openly perceptible for her. This experience was only mine, could only be mine. It is a realization both desolate and precious: there is value in the only, lonely though it may be.

Onliest, Curt Haworth Movement and Performance, Mount Vernon Dance Space, November 22-24.

By Becca Weber
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