

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Alan Diberio

Inhal(In)g Philadelphia!

by Gregory King

One of the few choreographer's showcases on the Philadelphia dance scene, InHale Performance Series at CHI Movement Arts Center, now in its 6th year, provides a relaxed performance arena for artists to share their creative journey with the general public and receive support in the form of written audience feedback. On October 17th, most were Philadelphia-based, presenting works in genres ranging from ballet to contemporary jazz.

The show opened with Jennifer Yackel's *One Small Thing*. In a solo that delivered elegant lines and controlled movement, she painted her canvas with glorious extensions, arabesques and smooth sequential gestures. Yackel danced with a precision that showcased her flawless ballet technique.

THAT WHICH CONNECTS, a quartet performed by the Introspective Movement Project, featured frontal, generally symmetrical, quick-fire choreography. The dancers were grounded and danced with a very bound quality that gave tension to the fast-paced movement. They used each other as leverage to ascend airborne. Enjoyable as these moments were, watching them play with and partner each other made me question whether they were sisters, friends or strangers?

Belle Alvarez' *you're here at last* was an artistic reflection that dwindled down from a quintet to a trio because of injured dancers prior to the performance. The three females moved with a casual ease, and their youthful attire of colorful socks, jeans, sneakers and mini dresses gave the piece a fun, carefree feel. The quirky arm gestures reminded me of sign language and the dancers played with levels and speed — plummeting from standing to rolling on the floor in milliseconds. A recent graduate of Temple University, Alvarez crafted a piece that was neither flat nor one dimensional; I would be interested to see how her work evolves with audience feedback.

Meredith Stapleton's *Coats*, a quintet with five female dancers wearing sport coats and sunglasses, made me ask "what's in a name?"

The costume mirrored the title, but the title offered no insight into the piece. The five dancers got a few chuckles from the audience when they struck flamboyant, campy poses. The women traveled from downstage to upstage where they removed the coats and sunglasses at various points throughout the piece. Free and light in their movement sensibility, they carved through the space with a sustained quality reminiscent of the tai chi-inspired work of Cloud Gate Dance Theater.

Two pieces in the second act stood out to me: Sean Thomas Boyt's *The Prince* and the duet *It's Not So Far Once You've Been*, choreographed and performed by Adam Kerbel and Teresa VanDenend Sorge. A fist pumping, lip-synching, movement monologue, *The Prince* was at its best when Boyt started moving. He began center stage wearing dance warm ups with his right arm lifted, fist clenched, as he sang along with a recording in a foreign language. This went on for what felt too long before he stood and started reciting a text by Japanese lyricist [Yashushi Akimoto](#). The script was not in English so it was hard to comprehend its connection to the whole piece. Boyt stood still while reciting, only to erupt into an articulate display of classical ballet vocabulary when he broke from his verbal offerings. With virtuosic flexibility he sliced through the space, showcasing his supple lines. The piece left me wanting to see more of Boyt's dancing and less of everything else.

The program notes for Kerbel and VanDenend Sorge's *It's Not So Far Once You've Been* suggested that the piece was about Alzheimer's as they both have family members living with the disease. Both dancers meandered around a sofa in the middle of the space as if it were a metaphoric home. A clear narrative, the piece showcased the partnering ability of both dancers and further tightened their connection to the subject matter when Kerbel started reciting a text he repeated but would alter in sequence as if to show how the early signs of Alzheimer's disease affect short term memory. The familiar lyrics of James Taylor's "Fire and Rain" heightened the emotional quality of the piece and added a layer of sadness. At times Kerbel and VanDenend Sorge whirled from the sofa only to return with a quiet composure. There were carefully placed moments of stillness, allowing the audience to feel, palpably, the quality of this crippling disease.

What makes the InHale Performance Series a success is the nurturing community it offers to emerging and established artists. It gives the public an opportunity to experience a wide range of dance art in an informal setting. Pleased as I was with the diversity in genres, I found myself asking where were all the men? Where were all the artists of color? Race and gender were not spokes in the diversity wheel that was presented at the InHale Series that night and I would like to see more done to encourage males and artists of color to apply and participate in the next InHale Series (scheduled for February 6th 2015).

InHale Performance Series, Chi Movement Arts Center, October 17.

By Gregory King
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