

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Tim Summers

BeginAgain: A Narrative Reinvented

by Gregory King

In a dance world where performances can sometimes be inundated with repetitive structures that don't hold interest, familiar vocabulary and trite contextual references, choreographer Zoe Scofield and visual artist Juniper Shuey circumvented these potential drawbacks by collaborating to reveal familiar narratives, reinvented.

The company of *zoeljuniiper* presented *BeginAgain*, an imaginative world of carnal movements and attention-grabbing video art at the FringeArt's waterfront theater. Blended strikingly to create a space that was divided into abstract chambers, the duo's imaginative amalgamation of video, light, and sound embraced the capacious vessel of the performance space and invited the audience in.

Conceived, designed, and directed by Scofield and Shuey, *BeginAgain* ushered the viewer into a complex world of a textured backdrop with intricate scenic cut-outs, iridescent scrims for Shuey's mesmeric video projection, and plaster casting molds. The intense, electronic and often screeching sound design of Julian Martlew added to this world, layering with the contrasting subtleties of Scofield's choreography and the vivid graphic offerings of Shuey.

Dancers Zoe Scofield and Ariel Freedman wore short grey-laced dresses that mimicked the botanic-textured backdrop. They stood in a patch of dirt covering the stage floor where they slowly discovered each other with tender touches. Moving in unison, they gently collapsed to the earth. Manipulating each other, they touched with sisterly adoration. Hand to face, hand to neck, face to thigh, knee to chest, shoulder to shoulder, and leg to back: when they weren't performing the same steps in unison, they mirrored each other. This theme of togetherness was a recurring refrain in the hymn that was *BeginAgain*.

Scofield and Freeman abandoned the dirt to stand center stage where the iridescent curtains were strategically placed to separate the

space. Starting in first position, the dancers deflated into a grand plié that was interrupted by a ripple that took them back to standing in parallel with feet hip-width apart. Tranquil ballet vocabulary co-habited with flailing arm gestures, quick-paced level changes, relaxed feet, arabesques emerging from tossing the body and angles that formed with bent elbows and knees. This gelling of unlikely elements was another nod to Scofield's successful reinvention of the familiar.

BeginAgain presented various frames of interactions. Each moment was rich with the dynamic inclusion of all collaborative factors but two sections stood out, as evidence of zoeljuniper's creative collective intellect. The first was of a lone performer who stood in the soil of downstage right while angling her body so her reflection became an added presence on the scrim. With Shuey's projection, a second shadow was placed next to that of the dancer, leaving us with the image of one live performer and two shadows on the scrim: a visually stunning moment for zoeljuniper.

In the second powerful section, John Pyburn, dressed in a suit, entered the stage carrying a bucket. He knelt in front of a corpse-like form and proceeded to place what appeared to be plaster-impregnated cheesecloth on the reclining body. This moment was rich with mystery, and I struggled to understand who he represented. A colleague suggested that "maybe he was a father figure, seeking to lock in his memories of his daughter or to give permanence to her fleeting childhood." Either way, the figure meticulously plastered the form, and then stood to sing an operatic aria in French. Alternating between the soprano and the alto parts, Pyburn's pitch was perfect as he delivered a melancholy tune that was soothing and unblemished. The show ended with the sound of his voice echoing through the silence, leaving me in a state of both heightened curiosity and pure ecstasy.

While some choreographers still struggle to win over audiences who search for narrative, zoeljuniper supplied an experience for all to relish. If zoeljuniper's *BeginAgain* is any indication of where dance as an art form is going, I'm happy to go along for the ride.

BeginAgain, zoeljuniper, FringeArts, April 9--11, www.zoeljuniper.org.

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