

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Jae Man Joo

Intricate Inconsistencies

by Whitney Weinstein

Step, drag, arch, clap, extend, bend, point, curve. The dancers faded in and out between the bright space towards the audience and the black depth at the back of the stage.

Slide, shift, break. They transitioned between fluid, intricate movements and frozen forms.

These creatures embodied the lightness of ballerinas and the strength of contemporary dancers. Classic technique met the foundation of modern dance.

After twenty-three years of Dance Celebration at the Annenberg, Dance Affiliates opened their new NextMove series at the Prince Theater with Complexions Contemporary Ballet (CCB). Dwight Rhoden (who was also the choreographer for all three works on the program) and Desmond Richardson, both alumni of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, founded CCB in 1994 with a desire to continue blurring dance boundaries by intercrossing ballet aesthetic with the contemporary spirit, formality with originality. Their history of varying performance venues, which range from American television to the Korean stage, reflects their allure to a wide audience.

The musical rhythms and movements of *Ballad Unto...* did not always align, nor did the passion and timing of the dancers. Embellishments flourished on some and were under-exaggerated by others. Many times, coupled dancers exhibited the same choreography in a way that evidenced distinct differences between each onstage relationship. Because of the imprecision and inconsistencies of detailed movement, the moments of simplicity - a bound step, an inhale, a flex of the foot - were the most powerful and demanding of my attention.

The final work, *Cryin' to Cry Out*, reminded me of a mildly kinky rock show performed by supermodels in an underground bar; it featured

shiny leotards, yellow lights, and metal tunes. The audience watched one character discover himself as an outcast, threateningly encircled by the other dancers or moving spastically amongst graceful suppleness. Each instant exposed his undeniable inner truth: resisting conformity pitted against the need for social acceptance.

In choreography featuring the male part of the cast, the dancers achieved a level of expression accompanied by seamless execution that was mind blowing. They brought force and community.

Each work was driven by passion and renditions of human connection, yet the language of the repertoire was limited in its choreographic vocabulary. The movement in each act was, at times, painfully similar, though the music varied drastically, ranging from Bach to Metallica. Each CCB member incontestably had exceptional ballet training. Turnout, verticality, and stage presence were all accurately achieved, though the dancers' expressive range was sometimes lacking. Emotional commitment was apparent in the dancers' bodies, but not always their faces. Genuine facial connections were omitted from intimate phrasings which could have otherwise proved heart-wrenching.

CCB is undoubtedly driven by strong, focused individuals. When not stunned in silence, viewers murmured reverence and often preemptively clapped during transitions within the pieces. Where I found shortcomings, standing ovations showed the majority of the audience was impressed by CCB's virtuosity. While the company may have initiated a range of reactions throughout the theater, their athleticism and movement skills went overlooked by none.

Complexions Contemporary Ballet, Prince Theater, October 14-18, <http://www.complexionsdance.org>

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