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Photo: Bill Hebert

Engaging Entanglements: Duende

by Lynn Matluck Brooks

New music/classical music; live music/live dance; dancing bodies/tangled textiles. These elements wound together to produce [Duende's](#) "Quilt," presented in two successive shows on one evening that enveloped the audience in an intimate exploration of gesture, motivation, and attention. Three of the musicians—Gabriel Cabezas, cello; Jordan Dodson, guitar; and Amy Yang, piano—have connections with Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, while Domenic Salerni, violin, recently moved to the city to join the Dalí Quartet. The dancer-choreographers—Chloe Felesina and Colby Damon—are both also BalletX members, with rich backgrounds, as well, in improvisation. This high quality of collaborators wove richly engrossing patterns in an hour-long program presented close-up-and-personal at the intimate Parish Room of Chestnut Street's First Unitarian Church.

The evening began with Salerni's gutsy, biting rendition of Alyssa Weinberg's "Unstrung," which drew Felesina onto the dance floor to scoot and writhe around two crumpled sweaters at center stage, while her own long white skirt at times threatened to strangle her in an Isadora neck-wrap. When Damon joined the dance, the entanglements involved his and her arms in a contemporary allemande of call and response, wrapping in, out, and around one another and opening to the audience seated on pillows, window ledges, and chairs encircling the performance area. To the music of Jerome Combier's "Dog eat dog," and then David Ludwig's "Isabella in Venice," Damon and Colby danced themselves into the sweaters that had served before as obstacles or slip-threats in their paths. Each wearing a sweater, their breasts pressed together, they stitched the other's sweater to their own sleeve, or hem, or back, until their blood-red yarn and glinting needles read like surgical sutures holding together a two-backed beast with a dual pair of guts that might, otherwise, spill their souls out. Too much togetherness? Gabriella Smith's "The Heaventree of Stars" brought the dancers to the floor, where Felesina crawled out of her sweater only to tie herself up in a spool of thin, red thread, like a puppeteer manipulating her own balletic limbs, or eventually, a ragdoll encased in her threadbare self.

Since so many of the works are by current composers, whose *oeuvres* I am unfamiliar with, I wasn't sure, by this time in the show,

which piece of music I was hearing, since the program was just a tiny card with no more information than the composers' names and music titles. I found it hard to coordinate titles with the actual performance, until better-known works, like those of Ravel and Webern, were played. Despite this minor difficulty, the through-line of the evening was clear: entanglement, sensitively enacted and explored among the musicians and dancers.

At last, Damon came to Felesina's rescue, snipping her gently out of her red-thread tomb, but she was soon back inside her sweater, enmeshed again in a duet with him, this time sweetly supportive. Soothed, they could part, each to rest across the room from one another, while Maurice Ravel's "Sonata for Violin and Cello" (*that* one I got) spread a richly sonorous banquet before us. David Lang's "Light Moving" drew Damon out of his seat, to the violinist's side. The dancer's isolated impulses resolved in stillnesses, then caught another gesture with the elbows, head, or torso leading him out to the dancing space. For Anton Webern's "Three pieces, op. 11," the two dancers joined again, this time for weighted partnering, supporting and stroking one another, creating between them their own textures of touch.

A lilting John Dowland guitar piece, "A Fancy," closed the program as the dancers, often in unison, interwove familiar balletic allegro phrases with sweeping arms, playful encounters, and, finally, a light, gracious farewell as Felesina and Damon parted, back to their places at opposite sides of the room. With the ensuing stillness, the spell's web was broken, but I was so glad to have been drawn into it.

"Quilt," *Duende*, First Unitarian Church, Jan. 13, <http://www.duendelive.com/events>

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