

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Carr Kizzier

Six voices, one work

by Andrew Klein

The more voices within the creative process, the harder it is to create a cohesive work. But when this sort of endeavor pays off, it often creates rich and surprising juxtapositions, and that's exactly how I experienced *Relate. Ruminare. Root.*, an interdisciplinary work by Triptych: Image. Movement. Sound. This was the second performance in the inaugural season of [Baltimore Independent Dance Artists](#), a volunteer-run organization founded in 2016 by my partner, Lynne Price, who also performed in this work.

The evening began with a reception in the basement of the venue (Church on the Square). The space was augmented by a minimal installation of sorts: the walls were adorned with wood furniture and plants lit by Edison bulbs; there were boxes filled with curiosities (feathers, pretty stones, an animal skull), but they existed on the periphery, and were soon hidden behind the crowd.

If the imagery was a little ambiguous, so was part of the work's description: "You are spinning your wheels. Can another be a mirror for change? How does one find themselves and their truth?" That's not a lot to go on, but nonetheless the evening progressed from one aesthetic to another in a fluid arc, one voice joined seamlessly to the next.

The audience was directed to the foyer where dancers materialized and moved up and down the stairs. I could only see flashes of assorted arms and legs and torsos as the dancers paired up and progressed through repeating sequences that ended with a slide down the banister. The view of the bottlenecked audience seated on the other staircase was wonderful, and that action (watching someone watch something else) would occur several times throughout the evening.

When the audience found their seats, Hannah Friedland sat on the ground as Jenny Ngidi-Brown appeared atop a lofted platform overlooking the audience. Dozens of thin ropes hung down from the railing, and we watched Friedland watch Ngidi-Brown move in languid, steady sequences back and forth across the balcony, pulling at the ropes, which created a minimalist visual against the wall.

This scene segued into a group sequence that emphasized tender pairings of dancers—a head would find its way under a hand, or an arm around a shoulder, and the lighting created a collage of shadows behind the dancers. The pacing was smooth, careful and deliberate, the live music created by Rod Hamilton and Tiff Seal imbuing the performance with a sense of the ethereal. Synth arpeggios flowed seamlessly with the choreography without overpowering it, and small cymbals added subtle punctuation throughout.

And then, the mood changed. Erin Reid emerged from a circle of dancers wearing a white dress. She stood atop a church pew, and boom—Hamilton and Seal cued up “Bossy” by Kelis. The crowd cheered as Reid performed a short, undulating solo of unabashed sensuality atop the pew (Ngidi-Brown watching). It was a shock, and should have come off as a bit gauche, but the atmosphere throughout the evening was warm and informal and the infusion of raunchy pop worked.

The transition out of Reid’s solo was almost as abrupt. It took me a few minutes to realize everyone was turned toward the back of the venue, where Lynne Price performed a searching, muscular solo that hugged the back wall and a banister. Once again I watched the audience watch someone else, and I marveled at how the performance used every inch of the gorgeous church space, making the venue the seventh creative voice of the evening.

Each performer had their own solo, which gave the work a cohesive structure and pacing. One started with Price setting up a projector on the floor. Christine Stiver stood in front of the projected video (blurry, cloud-like). Price asked inaudible questions, which Stiver answered loud enough for the audience to hear. The unheard prompts created a lack of context, but Stiver’s solo was a grounded, contained moment—she kept her whole body close to the floor as she talked herself in and out of combinations; she held on to her legs as she walked in a circle. The text felt quite personal, and yet it was a remote experience as well. I couldn’t tell you what Stiver said, but it didn’t really matter.

The work ended, unexpectedly, with an aggressive, sweaty, full-bodied sequence. The score—an electronic, heavily percussive, driving piece—was created in real time by Amy Reid on her laptop. The group choreography echoed the earlier, tender group work, but it wasn’t a soft decrescendo that mirrored the gentle plants and feathers in the reception area. In light of the phrasings that came before, it was a muscular exclamation point, a fitting testament to thoughtful collaboration.

Relate. Ruminare. Root., Triptych: Image. Movement. Sound., Church on the Square (Baltimore), February 24 – 25

By Andrew Sargus Klein

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