

Chauvinism weakens dance impact

Catharsis and convention in single T.I.D.E. programme

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Modern dancers are, often, purposely obscure, minimizing contact between themselves and the audience. Toronto Independent Dance Enterprise (T.I.D.E.) proved last week at Toronto Dance Theatre that they hold no such pretensions. They allowed early arrivals to watch their warm up before the performance. This 'preview' illustrated the qualities which make T.I.D.E. so innovative: openness, spontaneity, and an implicit rapport between dancers. While the company shares its 'joy of dance' with its audience, the spectators reciprocate by becoming imaginative participants.

Dancer/choreographer Alan Risdill says that T.I.D.E. has no expectations of its audience, except to be surprised. "What happens is supposed to happen; if you feel emotion, you should feel free to respond," according to Risdill.

In *The Bittersuite*, Risdill attempts to invoke the bittersweet feelings of lovers who part. It's French clown motif serves to show the colours of autumn, which are "vibrant in their death." Risdill's experience in theatre and puppetry is evident; every prop, from rods to running shoes, is effectively utilized.

Varying lengths of rods are ingeniously used as a metaphor for people in relationships being like rod puppets, manipulated by their partners. Rods, the connective element between the dancers, are used both to unify and separate the trio. Their function is changeable--Denise Fujiwara uses rods to prop up her collapsed mates, Sally Lyons and Gary Kurtz battle with rods as swords, and Kurtz as an acrobat uses a rod for balance on an imaginary tight-rope.

Allan Risdill as a choreographer of movement is highly talented and imaginative. However, as a choreographer of relationships--of explaining "how relationships form and why they fall apart"--he paints a dismal scenario of male chauvinism.

The plot and characters are stereotypical. Risdill describes *The*

Bittersuite as a "typical (but not fanciful) 'girl meets boy' theme". Girl meets boy while other girl sulks. Boy is possessive and controls girl's body and actions. Boy leaves girl stranded (sigh). Other girl offers support. Boy returns and "takes the reigns" using rods (groan). Boy egotistically performs acrobatic act (gasp...). Girls are aloof, then try to trap him (yeah!) Boy escapes by sheer strength (audible groan). Boy gives up on first girl and embraces her friend (who, of course, is all too eager). What is Risdill's solution to this melodrama? The abandoned female lover (?) transcends her sorrow by turning into a butterfly.

So it goes, happily ever after *The End--as The Bittersuite* belches from an overdose of saccharin. With a connoisseur's eye for theatrical movement and three talented dancers at his disposal, all Alan Risdill lacks is insight.

Set in Motion spins a fine silk thread of music and dance. As the thread unravels, viewers are offered strands of movement to weave into their own imagination. The piece begins in semi-darkness as silhouetted bodies are revealed by lantern light. A brief period of complete darkness introduces Andrew Smith's voice, beginning "Once upon a time, there were storytellers who spoke, not in words, but in motion." As the light brightens and dancers re-enter, Smith continues "Jump stories are different than hop stories, but the best ones are heart stories."

Choreographer Denise Fujiwara allows each dancer to interrupt the

narrator and continue his or her tale in motion. These vignettes are bubbly and humorous in their childlike spontaneity. Sally Lyons struts forward, laughing "ho ho ho!" and then complains of being "wrapped up like a Christmas turkey". Alan Risdill follows suit in a quasi-serious tone telling the audience about the ramifications of being a rock. Next is Fujiwara herself, personifying a duck.

Lyons discovers two colorful legwarmers up her sleeve, which offset the dancers' black and white costumes. As the piece progresses, more splashes of color and new props are introduced to the stark stage. In the end, *Set in Motion* is a kaleidoscope of vibrant colour and movement.

Although narration gives way to more ambiguous movement, sound is still an integral part of the piece. Andrew Smith, a York percussionist, showed intense concentration as he

subtly complimented the dance with music, sound and voice effects. The precision he achieved was remarkable, considering that often long periods of silence were broken by a single chime, synchronized to a sudden movement by a dancer. Smith, who composed the wide variety of musical effects, visibly strained with concentration as his face was bathed in sweat.

Fujiwara's choreography is finely tuned to the extreme variations in sound, from silence to a single drumbeat to calypso and beyond. The dancing ranges from lyrical to dizzy frenzy; from the sublime to the ridiculous. The dancers end by repeating the same movement as in the opening of the piece. However, Fujiwara's story *Set in Motion* ends on a much more vibrant, and colourful note than it began. The joy of the piece serves as a catharsis for even the most stifled imagination.

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