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Photo: Randl Bye

Double Vision: Dancefusion at the Philly Fringe

By Lynn Matluck Brooks

For the 2012 Fringe Festival, Dancefusion presented 2 programs, each repeated alternately over the course of Friday and Saturday, Sept. 7 and 8—a marathon for the dancers involved in both programs. “View 1” featured a work from 1995 by internationally known choreographer Colin Connor, formerly a soloist with the José Limon Dance Company, and 2 works by Mary Anthony one of the “greats” of the generation trained by Martha Graham, Hanya Holm and others of the now-classical modern dance establishment. In fact, at the Saturday matinee performance of “View 2,” Ms. Anthony was present—fragile but in attendance—for newer works by three less seasoned choreographers, along with one by Daniel Maloney, who himself danced with both Anthony and Graham. All works were performed with vigor and commitment by the company’s dancers, despite the small audience in attendance at the matinee.

Connor’s *Scales of Vertigo* was performed by Barry Kerollis and Rachel Kantra Beal. Starting as equal partners executing the same moves and partnering one another mutually, the two roles became distinct when Kerollis carried Beal to a long white table—a morgue?—and danced passionately around her supine form. She awoke to rise, stretch, fall off and step back onto the table, until he lured her off, only to suspend her high between the struts of a ladder where her cycling legs stroked him into submission as the lights dimmed. *The Wind* (1947), a solo Anthony first created and performed herself, was beautifully danced by Janet Pilla. Sensitively, and with utter clarity, Pilla pronounced the E. E. Cummings poem, “supposing I dreamed this,” that inspired the dance. As she spoke, her movements suggested the play of wind around the walls and windows of a house, wrapping its inhabitant in both love and jealousy. After her words, Claude Debussy’s music, played by pianist Noah Farber, inspired Pilla to fuller expression of those same movement themes.

“View 1” concluded with Anthony’s *Gloria*. Strangely, this work created twenty years after *The Wind* seemed more dated. The fuzzy recording of Francis Poulenc’s choral music was partly to blame, as were the stereotypical medieval-warrior tunics worn by both men and women at the dance’s opening. Also, the Dancefusion troupe missed the precise unisons that the dance required, although

individual performances were dramatic, strong, and committed. Nonetheless, the clarity of the movement's attack and its clear lines and arcs in gestures, body shapes, and pathways reminded me of the power of classic modern dance in its search for expression of the universal—whatever its exponents took that to be. I often miss this in contemporary dance today.

"View 2" opened with Maloney's premiere, *Fragments*, a trio for Janet Pilla, Christine Taylor, and Gabrielle Wright. The fragments we watched were dreams—funny, terrifying, or heartbreaking—that pulled the nightgown-clad dancers off their pillows, but also through encounters with such joys as ice cream, high heels, or gaudy baubles and with miseries—memories, fears?—that wrack the body without let-up. Barry Kerollis's *Gated Lies*, another new work, gave the choreographer a chance to show off his SAB (School of American Ballet) training, Kirov theatricality, and refined initiation of shivers, contractions, ripples, and even simple gestures. His expansive leaps, spins, and kicks convulsed into himself as he covered his lips and heart in self-censorship. In Justin S. M. Bryant's *Mrs. Yearning*, Bryant and Rosita Adamo fervently explored the words stated in the voice-over (atop a pulsing piano): *intimacy*, *sensuality*, *validation*, *understanding*, *power struggle*, *language barrier*, *yearning*, and so on. I admired the dancers' lithe, muscular torsos and impactful partnering. It was a relief to reach some kind of resolution as Bryant lifted Adamo on his back to exit with a birdlike rippling of wings. *Snarky*, by Charles Tyson, Jr., concluded this hour-long program with four women resisting and yielding to the terrors of unseen forces that drew, repelled, imprisoned, and released them in the course of a dance that featured a hollowly intoned recitation (Tyson's recorded voice) of Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky." We were, indeed, in the land of the absurd, although not the delightful: rather, Tyson's work, like the others' in "View 2," plumbed the convulsive, tormented side of human life. We saw some of this, too, in "View 1," but Anthony's works, particularly, also traveled through landscapes of joy and exultation. Perhaps it takes maturity to leave the pleasures of dark brooding for the admission of grace.

Dancefusion … 2 Views, Mandell Theatre of Drexel University, 3300 Chestnut Street, 2 dates from September 7, 2012 to September 8, 2012. http://livearts-fringe.ticketleap.com/dancefusion-2-views/

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