thINKingDANCE
Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation

Photo: Phile Deprez

How We Write When We Write About Dance: Ink on the Fringe

a Write Back atcha response

After *Still Standing You*, an hour-long exploration of the (sometimes hard to watch) physical manifestations of brother-ness created and performed by Pieter Ampe & Guilherme Garrido, old and new members of thINKingDANCE gathered with audience members to jot down thoughts about the show, guided by a few prompts.

The approaches to the task and responses to the duo were as wide-ranging as Garrido's and Ampe's work, with its myriad pop-culture references, self-made sound effects, and rough-and-tumble antics that somehow ended in visions of—if not sugarplums—at least tenderness.

Every performance, like every person, is an irreducible blend of influences, choices, and actions… but we also make sense of performance as it unfolds moment-by-moment by considering the images it evokes in us. Here are some of the pivotal scenes and comparisons the post-show group offered up as entrances into the progression they'd just witnessed:

We are welcomed by one image. Two men.
One man sits on a stool.
That stool is a man. A man lying on the floor with his legs straight up in the air.
The man on the stool speaks. The man who is the stool does not.
"Welcome to postmodern dance. Are you comfortable? Is there anything I can get you?"
Cheesesteaks, *The Matrix, Lord of the Rings*. Tongue-and-cheek banter and growls and postures. Presentable and presented. Bodies clothed. Support and sweat invisible.

Until, like meat slow-cooked and prodded off bone, these elements loosen and fall away.
We are left with one image. Two men.
Ass cracks, genitalia, a tender embrace, and a bow. No speaking. Sweat on both bodies. Dirt on both bodies, on the floor, on us.
Support and sweat rendered visible.

—Jenna Horton

…a father playing a game of monster with kids, being wild yet controlled… the children, being dependent on the adult to stop them from hurting each other yet pushing the boundaries of safety… adolescents challenging each other's sexuality… then having to go until total exhaustion to demonstrate a combination of domination and dependency and LOVE… wonderful.

—anonymous

The opening reminded me of how often in dance one dancer will sacrifice to allow the other to shine… Support roles [are as important as] all dancers moving in a well-timed choreographed flow, like cogs in a machine.

—Brian Castello

Dominant and submissive—the opening tableau of sitter and supporter… From that establishment of top dog/lower dog, [Ampe & Garrido] worked through their relationship with an intent towards equalizing… At the last moment their hands connected. Everything seemed to be leading up to that gesture, that connection. No bombs. No jokes. No twisting of the penises.

—Lisa Bardarson

Even through physical abuse we have an expectation that our partners will still support us in the end…[In] a man walking forward holding his limp lover in the "pieta" we see a Christ-like vulnerability.

—Roxanne Lyst

Like Lord of the Flies.
Like semaphores.
Like twins.
Like Napoleon Dynamite.
Like Zoolander.
Like zombie-in-a-lotus.
Like toddlers in their underwear.
Like Pepe LePew.
Then, this idea: I win—I can keep your underwear in my mouth a long time.

—Wyatt

One man stood atop the body of the other at back of stage and crowed his delight and clawed like a cat with its capture. The two bodies of men were transformed to predator and prey… the prey lying immobile on his side and for the moment silent and tethered to the ground.

—Randy

Snarling growls inviting smirking smiles. Curlicued penises in painful pleasures. The smacking of chests and entwined hands embracing.

—Jonathan Stein

Drawing a boundary of sweat and spit, two highly energized animals fight, ultimately cuddling one another in a naked embrace, exhausted, resting head on heart… surrendering while supported, then pulling up to comfort, to hold, to breathe as one. Exhaustion becomes sweet surrender, and their love for one another sweats through whatever boundaries once were set.

—Miyori Panis

In a revolutionary evolution of physical and mental states of beings together over time—this painful, comedic, heart-wrenching, ball-busting extravaganza of extreme movement begged many questions, including—Was anyone injured during the making of this piece? But ultimately it bravely ventured to explore an enormous number of sensitive issues, sensitively and with abandon.

—Mauri Walton

After all their use of audience-provoking movement, the two bodies settled into a familiar, archaic shape—that of an arch. They became that foundational pillar of support… but it was not a cold, stone statue. It held emotion conveyed by Gui's body draped intimately over Pieter's. Gui's slight and subtly rocking and caressing actions humanized the arch, and this pillar of support began to slowly, deliberately, and acrobatically locomote across the stage, narrowing like an accordion, expanding into a downward-dog-like V-shape. Inch-worming across…across…across to the other side.

—Fania Maria Tsakalakos

Imaginative, idiosyncratic, Matthew Barney, Shel Silverstein, Don Hertzfeldt. A moving piece that displayed the cooperation and competition inherent in our relationships. In the end, it moved me to tears.

—Danielle Cole

Still Standing You, Pieter Ampe & Guilherme Garrido, Painted Bride Arts Center, September 9-11.

By Kirsten Kaschock
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