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Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation

Photo: Frank Bicking

To delight and to rot

by Kat J. Sullivan

Editor's Note: "The Ripening Suite" was one piece in the larger showing, Building Home, *featuring works by members of Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers. This metaphoric response presents the author's interpretations and associations rather than a literal reading of the work.*

Meredith Stapleton emerges into the canvaslike-space, draping herself in luxurious gestures. She smears her presence across the space like the leftover lipstick of a brazen kiss; her lips are, in fact, red. As she circles a cradled arm overhead to pull her hair back fetchingly, more dancers appear, including Evalina Carbonell, choreographer and soloist. Despite the emergence of the group, each dancer remains isolated in the warmth of their own summer as they primp for some forthcoming bloom. I recall honeybees flitting as they map out a journey seeking nectar, vying for interaction, yet secluded by the individual caves of the comb. The performers recede, in a wash, leaving Carbonell to seduce us, to voyage to an orchid, to fall in love.

Her solo, opening *The Ripening Suite*, is the plumpest of the plums. She overflows with silent beseeching, "Harvest me," as she jumps back and forth, legs tightly clamped, arms curved upwards. Carbonell gives too much. She nurses her wounds, perhaps her rejection, in the smooth pulse of her legs, stretching and cramping. She self-soothes.

Tumbling back onstage with abandon, Stapleton and Isaac Lindy fling themselves into a saucy duet. Giggling after a roguish lift that hurled Stapleton's legs above Lindy's head, they mess their bodies together the way we smack our lips after a handful of huckleberries. They settle into a delicate dabbing of their limbs, wreathing their arms and plaiting their legs at the knee, just so. Lindy boisterously thrusts his pelvis up to pose in a plank, a boyish test. They are robust, they are flushed, they are the first time I held hands with a boy, they are overripe.

As the duet dissipates, soloist Grace Stern emerges, shushing the scene, like the winter wind chapping my lips, reproving me for smiling

too widely. She drifts and plucks her knees to her chest as she bows. Yet this is not serenity; it is a freezing, a numbness, an absence. She is queen but she is cold. If what preceded was a late-summer orchard, Stern is the frost. When her solo ends and Caroline O'Brien and Brandi Ou spill onstage after her, Stern tucks O'Brien's hair behind her ear with bitter resignation. Stern leaves, and I am left gray.

The closing duet of the *Suite* never blossoms into springtime. Spoiled by Stern's biting frost, Ou and O'Brien coolly cock one leg in front of the other, Aphrodites of the Arctic. I lament them, nectarines that will never ripen. O'Brien writhes blindly in search of the Succulent, or Ou, as the entire ensemble joins Ou in leaping back and forth, arms reaching outward, yearning to be plucked and oblivious to O'Brien's withering.

The Ripening Suite is wanting to be wanted. *The Ripening Suite* is scarlet and taut, then decay. *The Ripening Suite* is imploring, "Please, I am ready."

The Ripening Suite by Evalina Carbonell, in *Building Home*, Kun Yang Lin/Dancers, CHI MAC, May 7-9.

By Kat J. Sullivan
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