thINKingDANCE
Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Terrell Halsey

Whole: Without Any Parts Missing

by Karl Surkan

In its second full evening performance, *Whole: Without Any Parts Missing*, Coaction Dance Collective (CDC) presented four works layering spoken word, storytelling, and problem solving. True to the collective's stated mission, the program was a series of collaborations, and for the final dance they invited the audience to contribute text and image, which became part of the piece. In *Whole,* CDC's trio of choreographers— Gracianna Coscia, Emma MacDonald, and Julee Mahon—presented a lively and well-balanced evening of solo and group dance.

Whole opened with Gracianna Coscia's moving performance *The Turning Clock*, in which the lines of the poem "Vitruvian Man" were read aloud by her mother, poet Tricia Coscia. The title references the turn clock tool used by caregivers as a reminder to reposition a patient who can no longer move independently. In this collaboration, the mother-daughter pair created a meditation on the fragility of the body at the end of life, and the inevitable transition that takes place from autonomous movement to caregiving necessarily performed by others at the end of life.

"Every second hour of his remaining days/ They fold his limbs gently into the proper attitude," intoned the elder Coscia as Gracianna reached, arms outstretched in the familiar gesture of the *Vitruvian Man*. Her turning and revolving body evoked the image of a patient being lifted and lowered, rotating to arrive at rest in a new position. The irony of the solo dancer as agent of her own action was mitigated by the blurring of the boundary between patient and the clock itself. The inevitable march of time marked each new required turn in the remaining life of the patient.

The other two pieces before intermission offered glimpses from longer works-in-progress by Emma MacDonald and Julee Mahon, respectively. In *Mi Vida*, MacDonald explored the stories and memories of her grandparents' lives during the Cuban Revolution, passing out images of them fixed on colored pieces of paper. After stepping into a pair of heels, MacDonald sauntered across the floor to Luis

Aguile's "Cuando sali de Cuba" as she invited the audience to hold and reflect on the images before she returned to collect them again. Conceptually, *Mi Vida* was more interesting than its execution, since the distribution of the images felt like a somewhat pedestrian interruption in the otherwise reverent tone of the piece.

Mahon's *Frusta. . . Bene* was the first group piece of the evening, choreographed in collaboration with the five dancers on whom the piece was set. Described as an exploration of problem solving techniques, the dance incorporated many references to children's games and movement, including hopscotch, skipping, and rock-paper-scissors. As the piece began, a soloist broke out of the circle of five, leaving a quartet to represent the group; this four-to-one structure recurred throughout, creating a visual separation between the individual and the group.

The childlike aspect of *Frusta. . .Bene* included laughter. Half-way through, the dancers let loose with an energy that bordered on hysteria. This moment culminated in an eruption of frenetic movement set to MacDonald's arrangement of Devo's "Whip It." Such elements leant the piece a surreal quality, echoed in the periodic and abrupt collapse of dancers to the floor. The final scene restored tranquility as the dancers returned to a circle for a final round of rock-paper-scissors.

In a debut of CDC's first collaboratively choreographed work, the title piece *Whole: Without Any Parts Missing* served as the evening's finale. In fact, *Whole* was also a collaboration with audience members who, upon entering the space, were invited to share drawings, words, and phrases on small chalkboards. These words and images were spread out on the floor, shifted, and spoken aloud by the dancers as the piece progressed through four distinct soundscapes: city, night, train, and ambient music by The Album Leaf. The effect was one of visual and audio collage. Mahon, Coscia, and MacDonald performed a series of solos before returning to rearrange the boards and reading them again as they stepped through the story created collectively by audience and dancers together.

Whole: Without Any Parts Missing, Coaction Dance Collective, The Maas Building, February 27-28.
https://www.facebook.com/coactiondancecom

By Karl Surkan (1969-2023)
March 15, 2016