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October 19, 2015 | Beth Megill | 0 Comments

## Nancy Evans Dance Theatre Shares the ARC Stage with Friends and Family



Nancy Evans Dance Theatre presented their annual Friends/ Family/ Dance/ Festival 2015.5 October 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> at ARC in Pasadena. The event was intimate, heartfelt, and engaging, offering the Pasadena and LA dance community another glimpse into the variety within.

The show opened with a pre-professional dance group, the San Pedro Ballet. Choreographed by director Patrick David Bradley, the work, *Asylum*, celebrated young female dancers, challenging them to blend their ballet vocabulary with the quirky and crazy theme. The work was an athletic feat as the dancers flung themselves into the air and onto the floor with incredible speed. Set to Johann Sebastian Bach, the piece paired the elegant with the maniacal.

Next, Noelle Andressen of Ruban Rouge Dance and Paula Present of PTERO Dance Theater paired in a duet entitled, *Braided*. These fiery red-heads matched perfectly in this duet about sisterhood (in body or in spirit). The piece was simple and sweet including childhood games and playful partnering. The music by Antony and the Johnsons was upbeat, but a little redundant in the messaging. What I enjoyed most about the

piece were the moments of authentic connection between the dancers, where the audience disappeared and all that was left was the connection between them.

JESSICA KONDRATH | THE MOVEMENT presented a recent work *The Wit of Small Things*, which I had seen just last month. I enjoyed seeing the work from a different vantage point (from the front rather than the side) and appreciated the opportunity to see the nuance of the work again. I stand behind my initial review in that this piece had an undeniably hip quality behind it. This time around, I sensed an additional theme of the cosmos that I hadn't noticed before. The white costumes set against the black backdrop evoked an image of astronauts in space, as did the use of sustained time and light weight in the movement vocabulary. The sense of vastness in the work brought new meaning to the "small things" referenced in the title.

Changing the pace, Irene Watson of Watson Dance presented her solo *Lights Out*, set to See See Rider by Turk Murphy's Jazz Band. The opening tableau, with mussed hair, half opened eyes and one tired physique, created the tone for this sleepy comedy. We all do it everyday. We change out of our clothes, don our PJ's, take out our contacts and will ourselves not to collapse before we crash into bed. Watson's smooth floor work was effortless as she combined the physical challenge of appearing relaxed while supporting herself through a sequence of rolling and stretching on the ground.

The host company, Nancy Evans Dance Theater took the stage with two excerpts from a piece called *Shift*. The first was *Shift in Expectations: Role and Conflict*. This female quartet combined rhythmically driven foot patterns with refined arm gestures and the dynamic use of a wrapped cloak that the dancers tossed and flung through the air creating beautiful images with the theatrical lighting in the spirit of Loie Fuller. I deeply appreciated the original music by Blake Colie, which changed meters periodically. The percussive sound track propelled Evans' choreography through the space, compelling the audience forward through the piece. The contrasting gestures, smoothing the front of the cloak/dress, added a textural depth that lured me into the work, while the rhythmic drive kept me there until the explosive end. The second excerpt from *Shift* was presented later in the show with the title, *Shifting Sands: Age vs. Time*. This duet had an intensity rooted firmly in a sense of conflict and struggle. The male, Scot Tupper, represented time passing. His calm presence and unwavering focus embodied the relentless qualities we all know so well as we watch hours turn into days, turn into months, turns into years. The female, Jenn Logan, represented the struggle we feel as time passes, as we age and as we discover that we are powerless in our battle against it. The dance possessed a number of strong partnering moments and elegant spatial designs. For me, the most moving moments of the work came during the final moments of stillness as we witnessed Logan's personal struggle before relenting to her fate.



Shifting Sands  
photo by Karina Jones

The audience returned from intermission to another work by NEDT, choreographed by Evans' son, Nikolaos Crist Doede. The piece, *There Between*, continued the theme of personal narrative in dance as we witnessed the three dancers inhabit three generations of women. A daughter, left by her mother, then discovers her own motherhood. The ability of the dancers to inhabit the generational energies of the different women was impressive, successfully suspending disbelief just enough for the story to emerge through the dance. Set to music by Max Richter, Doede's choreography included powerful female partnering, a balletic underpinning seen in numerous extensions, and a penchant for meaning making that is profound and timeless.



There Between  
photo by Shana Skelton

Roots and Wings Dance Project took the stage with *Master of Chaos* by Shirine Rehmani. This is another piece I had already seen in a recent festival, and I much appreciated the chance to see it again in the larger ARC space. This contemporary jazz piece offered a nice change of pace, giving the audience a chance to emote through dramatic gesture and athletic phrases to the music of James Vincent McMorrow and Jamestown Revival. A piece about five women on a life journey, I most enjoyed the moments incorporating the handheld suitcases. The rhythmic setting

down, sliding and pushing over of the suitcases contributed a new vocabulary to the concert that was refreshing and unique.

Alex Floyd of OdDancity performed a solo, *Like A Hair in Your Mouth*, set to music by Jaap Blonk & Machinefabriek. Floyd is becoming known for her creepy take on concert dance and is not afraid to go to the edge of comfort in her work. This piece utilized a downward spotlight to highlight the hands, the head, and legs as they emerged from her tattered hospital gown. Floyd is not for the feint of heart audience member as she is unforgiving in her commitment to the disturbing that lurks within human nature. But, if you are a horror lover, she should not be missed.

Kristin Deiss of DEW/Dance presented a trio *Soul by Soul* set to music by Stars of the Lid. One of the more abstract pieces of the show, this work included three figures, traversing the diagonal length of the performance space. Dressed in pedestrian clothes, these dancers were well-trained performers who moved with strength and inner calm. The piece included a shift between the external and internal worlds of these dancers. The change in lighting stage composition (two dancers in stillness while the third took a brief solo), gave me a strong impression that these characters were in some sort of process emotionally or psychologically and we were moving between reality and their inner states. I appreciated the craftsmanship in the work and wish I could see it again so I could parse out the various motifs and thematic phrases. While I couldn't quite piece together this work on one viewing, the specificity in design of the dancers in space and time communicated that something more was lying just beneath the surface.

The show closed with a final piece from NEDT called *Lucy*. This is a joyous solo choreographed by Jenn Logan and performed by Ashleigh Doede. It's present time and Lucy clearly loves receiving presents. However, her oversized box seems to be filled with nothing but bubble wrap! Lucy makes the most of it, crunching and squeezing and jumping on the bubble wrap to make the most out of her popping present. A blend of ballet and outrageous character, *Lucy* had the audience leaving with a smile and a well-earned laugh.

The evening was characteristic of what Nancy Evans Dance Theatre is known for. The pieces were engaging, well paced and thematically driven, giving the audience a dance theater experience that balances accessibility with abstract movement. The audiences of this friend and family show left the theater joyful and satisfied.

\*Note: Megill & Company performed a new work *Boomshakalaka* on this evening's performance. As I am the choreographer and artistic director of the company, I have not reviewed the work.

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