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Shen Wei

2009-06-18

Re-tracing In Three Steps

Shen Wei Dance Arts kicks off the 76th American Dance Festival June 18th

Shen Wei, known worldwide for his 2008 work in the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremonies, launched the 2009 season of the American Dance Festival with the world premiere of "Re- (Part III)" on June 18th at the Durham Performing Arts Center. A statement of the contrasting cultures and social constructs of Beijing and New York City, the large group work re-imagined sociopolitical trends. Set to a haunting violin score by David Lang, the dance portrayed an unforgiving urban landscape with oppressive consequences. Costumed in moss green leggings and loose tanks, the group marched with crystal clear precision through the space, stopping on a dime and changing direction, back and forth, forward and back. Effortful duets emerged from the larger group, dancers locked together at the shoulder as if animals head-to-head in epic battle. As the tension became overwhelming, the duets collapsed together on the floor in defeat.

The most spectacular image in the piece occurred as soloists suddenly surfaced from the midst of these bird flock formations of people. Panic stricken, they became entangled in masses of relentless movement. Unable to catch up to the strict rhythm of its authoritarian demands, they pitched like sailboats trapped in rough seas. As they randomly broke away from the flock, the dancers became robot ragdolls, sharply twisting torsos and flopping limbs.

The piece transitioned as the dancers reappeared dressed in a various array of jean shorts, tank tops, and knee socks. This section suggested a New York City scene as hipsters bopped independently with each other. Though much of the movement vocabulary remained familiar in structure and shape, the impetus of certain movements had a distinctly American feel to them; they exuded more confidence and individuality, even a freer sexuality. A frenzy of action seamlessly dissolved into calm as trios formed, each wandering as a connected unit toward the center of the space. The small groups affixed themselves to each other and began to lower to the ground as the lights faded on the piece.

"Re- (Part I)" and "Re- (Part II)" followed after an intermission. Prior to the evening's performance in the theatre, Mark Dendy's large scale site specific work, "Would you please restate your answer in the form of a question?," welcomed an excited audience into and around the Durham Performing Arts Center. ADF's 76th season, exploring "Where Ballet and Modern Meet," continues with Emmanuel Gat Dance June 22nd-24th in the Reynolds Industries Theatre at Duke University.

Ali Duffy, MFA (To contact this reviewer use the "Contact Us" option on this website.)

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