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Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet

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Cut and Paste

Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet Presents Ohad Naharin's "Decadance" at ADF

Promoted as a collage of reconstructed moments of past works, Ohad Naharin's "Decadance" provided a conspicuous departure from formality and structure for ADF audiences June 25th-27th at the Durham Performing Arts Center. The dancers of Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet declared the stage emphatically theirs in an unapologetic, fierce foray into Naharin's assortment of work that spans two decades in this piece alone. While the dancers exuded cool confidence and some aspects of the work were wonderfully entertaining, the piece as a whole was fractioned and confusing, more closely resembling a dinner theatre review rather than a work to be shown at the American Dance Festival.

Silence permeated the space as a large group of dancers in black and white stared out, shifting suddenly in perfect unison. Violent solos and vocal outbursts punctuated the stillness with anger. Suddenly the group exited and a woman entered backing away from her domineering partner who seemed to want to devour her. Unforgiving and cruel, they pounded on each other, control switching back and forth throughout. As the accompanying operatic score came to a close, and shirtless men in African inspired pants entered, it became clear that the work was no more than a series of vignettes, not particularly interrelated. This ritualistic, primal quintet of men were then interrupted by a woman on stilts dressed in feathers and a sequined thong randomly strutting across the stage, followed by a line of sultry women in suits, hips swaying and hands dangling. A larger group of suited dancers appeared and coerced audience members to join them in some ballroom inspired movement onstage. Then a quintet of women in navy skirts and polo shirts danced an accumulated phrase to an accumulated score of text, quickly becoming as predictable as "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

The most powerful and interesting section of work followed Intermission in which the dancers reappeared in suits, this time sitting on a semicircle of chairs. A ripple wave series of lifted chests to the sky created a beautiful effect as once again, accumulated phrasing dominated. Stark lighting made deep shadows on the dancers' faces, making them appear androgynous and mysterious. Coats, shoes, and pants were tossed into the center of the space and then the space was cleared of clothing and dancers apart from a line of men in underwear. Again in a line and again confronting the audience and again in perfect unison, they ticked and shifted along with the sound of a ticking clock. Later, the dancers gathered for a romp into a nerdy, more naive world, bouncing their hips and donning underwear and cheesy smiles. After a too-brief solo danced exquisitely by Ana-Maria Lucaciu, the work came to a close with one of the other more exciting sections, this one consisting of large, sweeping movement and large bird flock running formations set to a score of 1970's elevator tunes.

The Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet dancers have a unique ability to eat up the space with titanic precision and poise, but the predictable choreographic tendencies in the work and overly exaggerated humor made the piece seem unsophisticated at times and outright boring at others. Alexandra Damiani, the company's Ballet Master explained in the post-performance discussion that Naharin wanted to play with the boundaries of silliness, trying to avoid a slip

into the realm of stupid. Skirting this precarious line of humor must be difficult even without the added challenge of making a coherent piece out of ten chunks of already constructed and seemingly unrelated dances. The work left much to discuss, but little to inspire.

American Dance Festival's 76th season, "Where Ballet and Modern Meet" continues June 29th - July 1st when H. Art Chaos will present "Flower of the Bones" and "The Rite of Spring" in Duke University's Reynolds Industries Theater.

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