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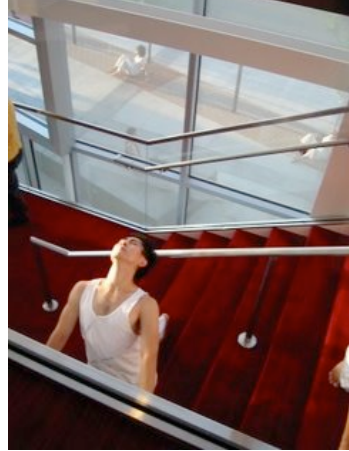
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Tuesday, June 30, 2009

meanwhile, in north carolina at the american dance festival...

Mark Dendy's *Would you please restate your answer in the form of a question?* (photo by Rosie Gaynor)



By Rosie Gaynor

I'm at the 76-year-old American Dance Festival in North Carolina for three weeks, learning how write about dance from some amazing people like [Suzanne Carbonneau](#) and random guests.

(So far: Roslyn Sulcas, Deborah Jowitt, Robert Greskovic, Tedd Bale, Seattle's Doug McLennan, and the list goes on...including dancers, choreographers, and dance teachers. The NEA offers this [arts journalism institute](#) in dance, theater, opera/classical music, and

visual arts.)

But the REAL reason I'm here is to see some amazing modern dance...and to learn to love it.

So far, so good.

Hurdle #1: Mark Dendy's site-specific work: *Would you please restate your answer in the form of a question?* The site was the Durham Performing Arts Center, where the Festival opened. The dance happened outside this new facility, and inside—everywhere—even in the bathrooms. Dance can be anywhere, anyone, Dendy seemed to be saying, and the message is a welcome one.

Some of you will remember [Mark Dendy](#) from his *Auguries* at PNB in 1998 and his version of *Les Biches* the year before, *Symmetries* in 1994, and *Ballet 1* in 1992. All I can say is that I'd love to see him come back to PNB.

Here are some more photos I took of Dendy's piece. They don't do it justice, but they'll give you a sense of what it was like.

Hurdle #2—The second performance of the evening happened inside the auditorium: Shen Wei Dance Arts newly completed triptych, *RE-* Oh, wow!

RE- stands for *return*, *reconsideration*, and *renewal*, according to the program notes. The words describe Shen Wei's concept, but they would apply equally well to this 41-year-old Chinese choreographer, his company, and the work's history, style, and emotional effect. How so?

Wei first came to the ADF as part of its International Choreographers program. He worked with 12 ADF students, six of whom he asked to join his new company. It was to be Wei's second successful troupe: at 23, he had been a founding member of China's first modern dance company.

Now 14-strong, Shen Wei Dance Arts returns annually to the Festival. This year, they added a two-week residency at Duke University (ADF's home). Through lecture/demonstrations, open rehearsals, and master classes, Duke students were exposed to Wei's "natural body development technique."

(In *RE*- this seems to mean that the impetus for a movement may come from any body part: one has only to let that impetus ripple through the body—flowing or jerking or stretching—until it encounters another impetus. Stillness is less a held pose than a drawn-out ending/beginning of another movement.)

RE- Part II (photo by Lois Greenfield)



Part III, partly choreographed during the residency, was slated to open the piece. The order changed opening night, making for better pacing, as *Part I* provides an inviting,

meditative/sacred opening; *Part III*, with its relentless, military-march and break-out individuality, veers toward climactic mania; and the end of *Part II*, with its anguished striving for renewed community, makes for a sculptural, visually stunning, and emotionally satisfying conclusion.

Part I has also been reconsidered since its 2006 ADF premiere. Which brings us to one emotional effect of the work. Wei, visual artist and student of Chinese opera, uses composition and spectacle to create mood and drama here. One spectacle I keep returning to is the *Part I* mandala. Videos of earlier versions show dancers creating it: in last night's performance, however, we saw the mandala ready-made when the curtain rose. From my vantage point, it seemed a colorful lighting effect. When the dancers finally breached its borders, and their shuffling caused paper bits to flutter up like thousands of flower petals, it seemed rapturously beautiful. Repeated movement stirred the paper into eddies. Even when the theme moved on, the paper kept fluttering, a recurring reminder of humanity's potential for renewal.

RE- Part III (photo by Tian Qinzhen)



Posted by Rosie Gaynor at 8:10 PM 

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