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**Pilobolus Dance Theatre**

2009-07-10

### **Garden of Quirky Delights: Pilobolus offers a complex miscellany of work at ADF**

Known for redefining the limits and uses of the human body in stunningly clever ways, Pilobolus Dance Theatre traversed new territory with a World Premiere and captivated an eager audience with four other repertory works July 9th-11th, 2009 at the Durham Performing Arts Center. The Connecticut based company, always surprising and never predictable, presented an eclectic mix of work that cleverly tugged at emotions and left us wanting more.

"Redline" opened the concert with a sudden jolt. It included smooth, Capoeira-inspired partnering movement juxtaposed jagged running and aggressive pulling and throwing, as the six dancers dressed in various mixes of black and red overcame a kind of contagious paranoid shuffling habit. Intricately designed trios tossed each other through the air as if gravity did not exist. As the piece progressed, the dancers evolved into robotic, machine-like creatures, physically seizing sudden sizzles in the music.

First premiered in 1972, "Ocellus" illustrated sheer power, and at the same time calmness. The quartet of men, naked apart from nude colored dance belts became a kaleidoscope of human bodies, contorting and shifting onto and around each other. Controlled and steady, the quartet seamlessly transposed one shape into the next.

An American Dance Festival World Premiere, "2b" told the macabre tale of a fisherman outwitted by his fish opponent. Choreographed by Inbal Pinto, the work journeyed first to the top of the ocean and eventually to the depths below. Surrounded by gray balloons that kept him afloat, the fisherman bobbed and weaved with the swaying tide until a lobster shuffled through a tiny red door to greet him and pop his raft of balloons, sending him to the dark depths of the ocean floor. A fish character flopped and awkwardly twisted in response to the popping balloons and a shrimp character stayed close to the others, preferring to passively wait out any imminent danger. The fish won out in the end, sinking the fisherman to his death. Inventive and thoughtful, Pinto evoked laughter, pity, naivete, and satisfaction in this sweetly sophisticated work.

Following Intermission, the 1971 septet "Walklyndon" captured the physical humorists in us all. Reminiscent of video game mascots, dancers were costumed in shiny yellow unitards with brightly colored shorts over them. Performing in silence, the dancers huffed and grimaced as they furiously slammed into each other with clown-like passion. Taking turns violently meeting and greeting, the accident prone dancers tripped, collided, and flew through the space without a blink, hurtling toward each other with breakneck speed and precision.

A 2007 piece "Rushes" closed the concert on a touchingly desperate note. A circle of white chairs filled the center of the space and the four men and two women enacted a sullen bar scene, the men trying to impress the women with dazzling feats of strength and agility. Soloist Jenny Mendez performed a light-as-air solo that spun and slid her across the stage like a feather caught in a breeze. The men took turns partnering with her, swooshing her body as if she were on ice. Annika Sheaff, a similarly glorious mover plucked herself from a chair and blindly grabbed a man at center stage. Climbing up his body, she clung to him as he carefully

carried her across a line of chairs that continuously accumulated as they were slid from back to front making the line grow. The image of chairs effortlessly sliding below this man who gallantly braved a precarious path for the woman he carried was breathtaking. What else could an audience do but gasp as the woman reached above her and gently pulled a string, fading both lights and music in unison?

The American Dance Festival's 2009 season, "Where Ballet and Modern Meet" continues in Duke University's Reynolds Industries Theatre July 13th-15th with Doug Elkins and Friends.

Ali Duffy MFA

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