

My Two Left Feet: Following Dance to Unexpected Places:

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Review: California Touring Project

Presented by Culture's Edge · Sherwood Auditorium, MCASD

Saturday, May 10, 2008 · By Brian Shaefer (writer for New York Times and Out Magazine)

It struck me as I was making my way to the Sherwood Auditorium for the California Touring Project on Saturday night that I'm pretty out of the loop when it comes to contemporary dance in my own state. I have the pulse on the scene in SD for sure (as we all do) but beyond that, I'm pretty ignorant as to both the history and the current state of contemporary dance north of us. Sure, I've heard of some of the bigger companies (Bella Lewitsky, ODC, Alonzo King LINES Ballet), not that we ever get to see them. But beyond that, I couldn't name a handful of smaller companies that reside and perform just a short drive away. I actually feel more attuned to the New York scene (thanks to a near-religious reading of The New York Times) than to the LA one. Of course, one could blame the newspapers – the NY Times boasts a rather robust list of reviews while the LA Times sadly released longtime dance critic Lewis Segal last month. But that's still no excuse. I haven't made the time to see work taking place up there, nor has anyone made much of an effort to bring it down here. Which is why Culture Edge's presentation of the second California Touring Project was both well conceived and much appreciated.

And the work was strong, too. Featuring groups from Santa Cruz, Los Angeles, and our very own hometown, the program offered an intimate human portrait of a range of relationships – from friendly to antagonistic to vaguely sensual to all-together ambiguous. And it confirmed something that I suspected a few months back when I saw them perform at Sushi's 4X4 performance series: I love Casebolt + Smith.

The Los Angeles-based duo of Liz Casebolt and Joel Smith brought their brand of warm, intimate, engaging, and intelligent dance to the program in two installments – the first entitled “In the Space Provided” told the tale of the birth of a friendship. Through casual, conversational dialogue and bursts of playful and intricate movements, we are introduced to two people who find in one another a creative partner and a system of support and encouragement. As we learn about their likes and dislikes, their respective romantic encounters, their hopes and fears, we are slowly brought into the relationship and ultimately, you can't help but to feel like you've found not just a creative partner but a new friend as well.

Their second work, “In Other Words” took on a darker tone. Seated behind a table covered in miniature toy soldiers, Casebolt + Smith begin a game of ownership and control, a power struggle over the configuration and positioning of the soldiers, one of whom is accidentally hit in the crossfire. The commanders pause to contemplate the loss then resume their physical bickering as more and more of the soldiers fall victim to large swipes of their arms and flips of the hand. Eventually the table has been cleared, an army of silent casualties that have succumbed to the powers that be and their reckless actions. Remind you of anything in particular? The work was a witty, relevant, and illuminating commentary on current global issues. Or, at least that's how I saw it.

A trio of San Diego dance professors, Eric Geiger, Liam Clancy, and Joe Alter gave the Southern California premiere of their year-long collaboration “still undecided” that explored the idea of co-authorship and the collaboration of a multitude of artistic minds from dance, dramaturgy, technology, and science. The result was an intricate study of various moods and feelings, depicted both through words and movement and returning to the theme of how one experiences time and space as they become altered and manipulated. The complex movement phrases around a low table were a feast for the eyes, complemented by a birds-eye view perspective of live video feed. The work provoked multiple senses and kept one's gaze shifting constantly, trying to make sense of the various stimuli. Though the transitions weren't always smooth and there seemed to be almost too many ideas at play to the degree where the overall work felt unfocused, nevertheless the cohesion of the performers gave the work a clear, driving energy.

Rounding out the evening, Sid Pearlman from Santa Cruz offered “Fire Sale,” a series of interlocking vignettes that explored the sometimes tender, sometimes violent relationships of a quartet. Though not narrative, Pearlman managed to develop individual characters that felt three-dimensional and genuine, much like her work.

So now that I've gotten a bit more exposure to contemporary dance taking place up and down our enormous state, I'm proud and impressed and eager for more.