

By David Lemberg

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4X4, Bluefoot Bar and Lounge, January 9, 2007

January 14th, 2007

4X4 kicked-off the New Year with a bang! There was dancing. There was singing. There was martial-arts-as-performance-art. And there were special guests from L.A. who brought down the house.

Let's start with the special guests, **Casebolt & Smith**. In its initial few moments, "After Words" looked like two actors breaking down a scene or performance, giving notes to each other. It became clear they were actually dancers, and they'd danced a dance that was supercharged with sex, relationship angst, and concerns about identity-in-the-world.

There were layers-upon-layers in this richly metaphorical piece. And, it wasn't all words. Intervals of dynamic dancing, recreating extended moments from the work they were rehashing, provided a powerful counterpoint to the dialog. The partner work as dancers and actors was strong, complex, erotic, and at times, very funny.

Liz Casebolt and Joe I Smith are intelligent and talented dancers-actors-performance artists. "After Words" presented a marvelous aesthetic and thought-provoking worldview, offering terrific dance-theater insight into the human condition. And, the piece was tremendously entertaining with laughing-out-loud humor. For me, "After Words" was very much like a movie, with all the elements of motivation, character, conflict, and resolution. Watching a "movie" as a live performance piece was a remarkable experience.

Leslie Seiters presented "Incidental Fear of Numbers", danced by herself, Amanda Waal, Dina Academia, and Justin Morrison. Although described in the 4X4 program notes as "an early-in-progress showing", this deeply satisfying piece could stand proudly on its own as a completed work.

The piece opens as the four performers seat themselves around the sides of the 4X4 stage, each placing a fat phone book nearby. We notice they're each wearing multiple large, clunky, pastel-colored rings — mini-cars, trucks, and assorted vehicles. The dancers flip through massive amounts of pages, giving the sense of concentrating but not-reading, and their arms begin to flop around, Gumby-style, slapping down on the floor. And then they begin to really move.

These very talented, lithe artists slithered through the 4X4 space, using the floor around the stage and expanding the volume in all dimensions. The phone books morphed from mind-numbing, meaningless collections of data into mini-platforms the dancers used to elevate, levitate, and contemplate new vistas of experience.

The partnering among the four dancers was intricate and physically challenging, requiring great strength and technique. At the close, Amanda Waal was alone, half on and half off the raised stage, hands and feet on the floor, in a supremely elevated convex arch that could not possibly have been any more extended. One by one, the others returned and successively placed the very heavy phone books on Waal's stomach. With remarkable control, using only her center, she reversed the arch and settled in an elongated posture with her

knees still bent and calves on the ground. The audience went wild.

Jillian Chu performed a solo work, showing us “myself at 24” and “now that I’ve turned 25 . . .” This was a bravura piece of great beauty, both physically and choreographically. Early on, Chu appeared to be exploring her own anatomy, and these actions segued into sweeping arm, leg, and torso movements that whirled her around the stage. This mostly allegro work contained wonderful adagio counterpoints, and clearly demonstrated how lyrical, organic, centered choreography can be, simultaneously, dance of great vigor, power, and force. The dance ended to thunderous applause.

Greg Lane and **Chris Luth** glided into the performance space in the deep plié of liquid Tai Chi forms, and it was as if two warriors had entered the combat pit. We were thus privileged to witness a Tai Chi demonstration as dance–performance art. And, what Lane and Luth did was much more than Tai Chi — the program notes describe the expression of Tai Chi “in its highest form through the partner play of Pushing Hands”.

Lane and Luth maintained a fierce, yet fluid connection throughout, tethered together by palpable, yet invisible lines of force, very much like Space Shuttle astronauts but with the 4X4 stage as the Mother Ship. They flowed powerfully around, across, and through each other, balancing and unbalancing. Erotic images flickered into existence, followed seamlessly by battle scenes, followed by Picasso- and Braque-like abstractions.

The formidable concentration required by this very challenging performance was gracefully matched by the highest levels of skill and expertise of the dancers.

Monique Fleming danced “Careless Summer Clothes”, a rocking performance interpreting “Hang Me Up To Dry” by Cold War Kids. Fleming’s costume included beige culottes and a torn shirt, and her partner was a big piece of fabric which had some pretty human characteristics. There were striking images — including a desperate hangman’s noose and intense percussive syncopation — as Fleming took us through a pretty rough day-in-the-life. Fleming’s clever choreography showed us the “muck and mire” of daily striving for order, self-respect, and dignity.

Victoria Robertson performed an inspirational coda to this remarkable evening. Standing proudly at center stage, wearing a white shirt, short red jacket, and an American flag scarf, Robertson sang “America the Beautiful” and “God Bless America ” as these patriotic anthems were meant to be sung. Her rich, operatic voice reached the farthest corners of the packed house, and she encouraged the audience to join her in singing “God Bless America ”, honoring our great nation, particularly poignant in our present crisis of national mission and identity.

Robertson’s bold choices were especially welcome as we begin a new year of freedom, hope, and sharing in our beautiful country and in our wonderful world. Anything goes at 4X4 . Freedom of expression is the watchword. The courage, fearlessness, and talent of the performers are inspirational. And the appreciation of the very savvy audience is boundless. We are always honored to be at 4X4 — Bluefoot Bar and Lounge, North Park, San Diego, CA.

4X4 is curated by Liam Clancy and presented by **Sushi Performance and Visual Art** .

Entry Filed under: **Dance**

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