
REVIEW: "Dance Noir" by Dissonance Dance Theatre at the Jack Guidone Theater

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by Raquel Lake

First impressions are everything when you walk in to see a performance: the lights, the seating, and the general ambiance set the tone for the evening. The score from *Inception* was playing at the Jack Guidone Theater on Sunday, October 14th before the show, and it cast a dramatic mood. I was intrigued to see what Shawn Short had in store for us with *Dance Noir*.

The show opened with the world premiere of *Hope* choreographed by Shawn Short. Dancer Alice Wells was mesmerizing in a wine top and diaphanous skirt, her pointe shoes driving to the operatic aria "Vole Mon Ange." While I watched the petite Wells leap and spin across the floor, I wondered who she was looking at as she stared out into the expanse. With every spin, leap, and extension, she captivated the audience. Her attention to detail and intricate articulation commanded my attention. I watched her float across the stage at the music's most rousing and climatic moments, and the urge to dance along with her was overwhelming. Her elegance was truly contagious. The overall feeling was that Wells was searching for hope and willing the world to hope along with her. Yet without any clear resolution, the lights went out.

The next piece, *Shall We Dance*, also choreographed by Short, featured the electrifying William Wilson and the equally talented Momo Sakai as two lovers dancing with happy faces to Chopin. Sakai pirouetted, fluttered, and floated in her tutu while Wilson looked on with glee. The two glided across the stage dancing together with sweet interplay and wowed the crowd with daring lifts. The lifts were well choreographed and effectively demonstrated their strength and grace. Each dancer then performed a solo for our delight while the other stood with their back to us. After each lover's solo, the pair reunited. They ended the piece mirroring one another until we were left with a delicate lover's lifted embrace. The chemistry between Wilson and Sakai was wonderfully charming.

During the two minute break, I waited with great anticipation for the next vignette to begin. I started to feel like a curious voyeur looking into a viewfinder at keenly choreographed pieces that made up *Dance Noir*. The next segment was a full ensemble piece by choreographer Adam Sage called *Baroque Fantasy*. The dancers were all dressed like impeccable ballerinas, donning pointe shoes and skirts, each with a neat low bun, ready for class. What an amazing site to see a talented multi racial ballet company perform to Vivaldi. It was refreshing to see such a diverse cast.

Baroque Fantasy began with a quintet dancing in and out of unison. They chased, they spun, and they leapt across the stage matching the mood and tempo of the music. I really enjoyed their musicality. Watching the dancers interact with music and each other gave added meaning and impact to the piece. There were a few nervous moments among the dancers, as if you could see the butterflies in their stomachs, but I sensed their rigorous training helped keep them composed and able to deliver.

Shawn Short's choreography in his opening pieces highlighted the strictly trained, talented classical ballet dancers. He used their bodies to demonstrate elegance and emotion in a way only ballet can. In his second act he demonstrated how contemporary ballet can be used to speak on current affairs and make a statement.

The first piece of the second act was *Seize*. Rousing music by none other than famed film score composer Hans Zimmer was met with edgy choreography. With floor work adding new dimension for the performers, it felt as though the dancers were able to let loose and explore the movement without restrictions. Just as dynamically as it began, *Seize* ended with eye catching imagery: five dancers making guns with their hands and pointing them at the sole dancer in the circle who had her hands raised up, begging them not to shoot.

For You was one of my favorite performances of the night. Allison Eguchi's performance was an intimate look at a liberated ballerina. Her deliberate precision and ballet vocabulary made her performance jaw dropping. Each time she reached to the heavens or fell to the floor, you felt her pain, her loving, her longing. When the lights went out, she received well deserved applause.

The last piece of the night, *12x6*, was a full world premiere piece by Shawn Short. It was inspired by Reginald Rose's *12 Angry Men* and Frigyes Karinthy's *Six Degrees of Separation*. It featured most of the company and was broken up into five movements.

12x6 was one of the most challenging pieces of the night for the full cast, who were now all dressed in everyday clothes. In "Overture," the first movement, some of the dancers struggled with execution and timing, but the stronger dancers were able to hold my attention. The next movement, "Strangers," featured a spectacular quartet of dancers – Shannon Evans, Momo Sakai, Allison Eguchi, and William Wilson.

In this piece the flexed foot took on a whole new meaning. Bodies were used to demonstrate the awkwardness of meeting someone new and left the audience on the edge of their seats. "Retract & Reset" featured Evans and the wonderful Sakai again entertaining an audience with enthralling dance.

By the time we got to the fourth and fifth sections, the dynamic "Guilty" and the poetically performed "Lament" with outstanding solos by Jessica Potts and Brooke Senger, I wasn't ready for any of it to be over. *12x6* came to an end with an iconic gesture of six dancers looking out into the darkness with left hands raised palm up, as if to take an oath, and the audience was broke into uproarious applause and adoration for the night's stunning work.

Dissonance Dance Theater is one of the oldest ballet companies in the DC area, celebrating it's 10th year, and it is a part of Ngoma Center for Dance. It is being led by Shawn Short into a bright future, and tonight's production of *Dance Noir* was no exception.