
REVIEW: Dissonance Dance Theatre presents Mahogany Strings at INTERSECTIONS

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By Taryn Brown

Dissonance Dance Theatre dazzled the stage inside the Lang Theatre at the Atlas Performing Arts Center during this year's INTERSECTIONS Festival. *Mahogany Strings* showcased a collection of short pieces choreographed by Artistic Director Shawn Short and Brazilian guest artist Rafael Gomes. The dances utilized contemporary ballet structures to tell playful, introspective, and sensual abstract narratives.

The program included two solos choreographed by Mr. Short. In *Bleak* we saw Allison Eguchi reaching and waving her arms as she seemed to search for something lost from her past. Eguchi confidently filled the stage space with stately graceful composure. *Walk With Me* showed Damon Foster in complex hinge balances, floor rolls, pirouettes, and flexed feet designs. Foster showed strength and power as he raised his arm in a seated 4th position on the floor, yet succumbed at the end of his dance. As he fell into a fetal position, the accompanied drums and cello soundscape simultaneously concluded its expression.

Short also choreographed (and premiered) three ensemble pieces for *Mahogany Strings*. They included a fast-paced allegro, *Khacha*, a snappy short number entitled *Big Band Suite Mvt 3*, and an elongated work, *Key in Ebony*, where "hip-hop meets pointe shoes," (as stated in the program).

Khacha was technical and highly virtuosic. The pace created a tremendous gusto of passion across the proscenium space. The choreographic complexity combined with the crisp performances pinpointed how much training and talent are demanded in successful classical dance. The formations quickly kept changing between variations of the numbers of dancers on stage. The use of parallel and archaic shapes gave it a look from the early 1900's Diaghilev era. At other times, it seemed to be an aerobics ballet, with constant petite allegro. In many ways, it felt that this opening piece could have been saved as a finale, but it was a very energizing way to begin the show.

Set to music by Chick Webb, *Big Band Suite Mvt 3* was simply put, super cute. The women's leotards with elastic waistbands with tights underneath were adorable. They matched well with the men in white tanks and blue-grey leggings. The dance featured several Balanchine type moments. Most notably, we saw pointe work done in parallel, as well as the classic one leg straight with the other bent while pushing over the pointe shoe. The only thing missing from this dance was increased duration. It definitely left me wanting more.

In *Key in Ebony*, we witnessed pointe work set to music by Kelela, Black Violin, and local hip-hop rapper, Tru Ghost. It's quick moments of house steps and shoulder shimmies combined seamlessly with sauté arabesques. The ideas behind the piece were wonderful. It was pleasing to watch classical movement set to four-to-the-floor sound. However, the piece lacked depth in its human connections. There seemed to be a disconnection between the sultry lyrics/chill-out vibe of Kelela and the memorized actions of the dancers. Similarly, the raw freshness of Tru Ghost's music seemed to overpower the classical choreography. All in all, *Key in Ebony* has great potential as to what the future of Dissonance Dance Theatre's voice can be. Especially if it were to be developed and approached with great care towards movement invention, relationship sensitivity, and personalized identity.

The 2017 Ngoma New Voice of Dance Recipient, Rafael Gomes, choreographed *Gira* for the company. The fusion of African. Brazilian. modern. jazz. and ballet movement invention was splendid to watch. The use of undulating

included moments of brushing shoulders and a motif of flicking one leg to back attitude with the torso leaning forward in a diagonal line. Some of my favorite moments were the ones that demanded a poly-awareness from the spectator. These involved dancers doing many different things at once, which made the space truly dynamic while my eyes shopped around for something to focus on. Conceptually, I was not sure if *Gira* was telling a story of a mating ritual, virgin sacrifice, or just presenting a collage of sensualized imagery. Regardless, it was pleasant to watch.

Shawn Short said in the closing Question and Answer period that he is happy that Dissonance Dance Theatre is "growing and able to keep giving artists a voice." It truly does seem that the company is able to do as such. It is exciting that in its 10th year, DDT gives so many highly trained dancers the ability to perform intelligent work by local and guest choreographers. The company's multi-racial makeup, youthful exuberance, and high quality professionalism, give it a solid place as something to be proud of within the District dance scene. When Short stated "I'm happy that you came" during the Q&A session, I thought to myself, "me too."