

REVIEW: Dark Night Showcase at Synetic Theater

Review: Synetic Theater's "Dark Night Showcase"

by Matthew Rock

As I opened my program to the "*Dark Night Showcase*," I knew I was in for an interesting evening with the amalgamate of dance shorts and excerpts. The showcase is an annual event that was first produced in 2014 by Synetic Theatre company members Kathy Gordon and Philip Fletcher, in partnership with Gordon's own K.G. Dance Company, to present work by Synetic company members. This year, the showcase has been opened up for other artists in the area to present and perform their work as well. Ten different pieces were to be performed. The house lights dimmed, and I sat back in my cushioned seat and awaited the journey.

As soft, blue lights illuminated the nostalgic and hazy stage, the voices of songbirds began to fill the room, setting a tone of tranquility and longing. The opening piece, choreographed by Chanel Smith, featured four dancers in cloud-white and grass-green dresses balanced in an attitude position to the side. They slowly extended their legs, creating an abstract image of what seemed like tree branches growing outwardly. This led into accented staccato movements as if the branches were breaking from the tree. Even with the harsh accents, each dancer's movement would flow seamlessly into the next, limning the qualities of nature. The dancers moved like the wind, sometimes vigorously and other times with dwindling movement that found moments of suspension. The movement grew as dancers connected to one another forming duets, trios, and quartets. As the piece continued, you began to see the connections fade in and out, concluding with the dancers being fully disconnected. A new abstract image is created as each 'tree' stands alone. I was left with the thought that any type of connection with humans, nature, or any other means, can be lush with fervor, dwindle into a plateau, or even diminish. Maybe that's just the nature of life: Nothing is permanent.

In the piece that followed, two vocalists, Tori Bertocci and Erika Straus, took the stage and created a more intimate, minimalist set with just two chairs and a keyboard. As one vocalist began to tickle the ivories, a familiar melody ensued over the audience, and the renowned lyrics of Ruth B's "*Lost Boy*" started to take us to another place. At first, the intonation of the notes was a little shaky, but found more stability as the song continued. The first vocalist produced a raw and organic sound quality that complimented the message of the lyrics: that feeling lost as a person can cause us to shed our layers to become exposed, vulnerable, and in a raw state that's true to ourselves. As this sound flowed throughout the house, a second voice layered in creating harmonies that danced with the raw and melodic sound waves being produced by the first voice. The second voice had more of a classical and controlled sound that was smooth and songbird-like and created an intriguing timbre when paired with the first voice. Feeling lost within our society or life can push us to find control and strength in our vulnerable states. It exposes us to life and can present new discoveries about who we are. Sometimes, we have to let go of our controls in order to find them again, and I thought the duet captured that essence in a realistic and beautiful manner.

One piece that resonated with me and even had me moving in my seat featured a soloist, Laura Gelles, dressed in black shorts, a black top, with hair worn down and disheveled. She had a presence that mimicked something almost animalistic. She moved with fervor and strength, carving out the space with distorted and angular movements that would transform into crisp, linear lines. The flow of movement patterns paired with the superb musicality and performance of the dancer created harsh hitting accents, bold demurs, and raw and genuine emotion. As the piece started to come to a close, you could feel the strength and vehemence exude off stage, settling in your body with energy. It left me to ruminate on battles within our own self, conquering a struggle within, and how it can effect our body, mind, and soul.

After a couple more dance shorts and performance excerpts that ranged from vocal performances to a hip-hop duo, a dance theatre piece that touched base on our inner demons, and an experimental piece where two dancers choreographed solo movement to the same song and performed it for the first time on stage as a duet, the *Dark Night Showcase* decided to close out the show with a group cast piece, choreographed by Kathy Gordon, that was rousing yet slightly eerie and warped. Nine dancers covered different levels and depths of the stage, creating a steampunk tableau. As one dancer began to stamp a stick down centerstage, the picture began to come to life in an eerie and whimsical manner that resembled scenes from the 2001 film, "*Moulin Rouge*." The dancers seemed to almost be courting each other as they promenaded in a circle, switched partners, and performed to the opposite group onstage. It was an eccentric and energetic way to capture the full essence of all the performances showcased that evening. Synetic Theatre showcased some beautiful and interesting work that was captivating and took me on an exciting journey.