

## REVIEW: Errant Movement presents *oneness*

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by Kacie Peterson

The Anacostia Arts Center's black box theater is a small, intimate space. Set with four rows of folding chairs on three sets of risers, it is a space which awaited the opening night of Errant Movement's performance of *oneness* on Friday, May 5th.

Most of the works on the program are that of Artistic Director Rachel Turner; the rest of the program features work by guest choreographers Mariana C. Barros, Chartamia Turner, Jocelyn Isaac, and guest performances from Maverick Lemons Dance Project and Ashani Dances.

A string of solos choreographed by Rachel Turner were strategically placed throughout the night. The first solo, titled *I. You Ain't Never Gonna Fly*, opened the show. Set to "Blackbird" by India Jean-Jacques, the piece was short and to the point. Dancer Sydney Todd performed with her elbows tucked in, like a broken-winged bird. Most of the movement was performed facing away from the audience, which I thought worked well in that instance. Her head dipped and she passéd her leg with the elegance of a long-legged fowl. She was graceful and determined. The lighting cast a fitting silhouette to end.

The second solo in the string, *II. No Longer Silent* occurred after the first of two pauses in the evening's program. Dancer Kaya Simonson was beautiful to watch. Her solo, danced under warm yellow lighting, utilized more of the stage than the first solo. It was obvious that character development was taking place. She swirled and lunged while maintaining a smooth quality in her movement. I connected with her intensity. She was no longer silent, indeed.

*III. Power* began after the second pause in the evening. This piece was not as memorable for me as the solo which preceded it, though dancer Karlin Gatton carried her own. She completed her arabesque turns and lofty leaps with ease and grace. It seemed that her effort quality remained at a steady level throughout the work, which certainly fit the title of the solo. However, I would have liked to see her explore a range of efforts, as there can also be power in vulnerability.

The fourth and final solo, *IV. She*, ended the evening. I had seen this work in its early stages during the National Choreography Month showing at Dance Exchange in February. I remembered thinking that the solo was almost at performance level in February, but was not quite there. Friday night I was pleased with what was presented. What I had wanted more of in February included a feeling of a period at the end of a statement of movement, rather than a question mark or no punctuation at all. I wanted to feel that each step was complete before the dancer moved on to the next one in the phrase. I got that satisfaction this time around. Dancer Blair Galiber was graceful as she danced the solo with more direction and sharpness than I had seen previously. Her ending was similar to the other solos, but with a noticeable difference. As the spotlight focused in, she did not face the back wall like the others. She faced the audience and used her hand to tip her chin up. This was a woman who had found herself. She smiled and we knew.

In addition to these solos, the evening's program was made up of an assortment of duets, trios, and larger group works. Despite the small space, the dancers adapted the choreography well.

Turner's *Waves* was the fourth work on the program. The trio of dancers in this piece wore dark dresses and stood in a triangle formation. With their elbows bent, the dancers quickly moved their hands towards their mouths as if slurping water before it slipped through their hands. The core of *Waves* was an interesting combination of solos working in a group setting. The dancers carried

out their own movements while simultaneously behaving as a unit. The quick feeding gesture brought the trio together several times throughout the piece. I appreciate works that keep audiences visually engaged with unexpected movement pairings and patterns. Throughout the night, this aspect would be a highlight in Turner's many works.

Turner's choreography in *Waves* (and throughout the evening) is full body movement. Every inch of a dancer's kinesphere is used. Turner does not shy away from the backspace, often inserting lunges and extensions to explore the unknown. Her dancers are technically strong, as demonstrated by their beautiful leg extensions.

Following the first pause of the evening, five works were presented.

Two pairs of women (one pair dressed in orange tops, the other in off-white tops) beautifully depicted the desire to stand up despite pressure to sit down during Turner's *resist.endure*. Four dancers faced upstage, standing next to the partner of their color. The dancers in off-white stood the furthest downstage and began with a gestural phrase. The other pair of partners waited before dropping into a phrase of lunges and low level movement. Dramatic lighting impacted the way we viewed the dancers. The dancers were flooded in light that transitioned from yellow, to red, to blue.

The partnering in this work appeared to be created as a choreographic necessity rather than a choreographic accessory. The multiple combinations of partners often relied heavily on each other through weight sharing and shifting. It was refreshing to see dancers so dependent on each other to complete a movement task. Out of the two dressed in orange, one dancer was always more complacent with her partner. The other was always a little more hesitant and resistant to the pairing. The work ended as the off-white dancers stood far enough apart, but close enough together to prevent the orange-clad dancers from breaking through. It was a powerful image that might suggest that resistance is never easy, but necessary.

Further down the program, *Please Stay Seated* opened with dancers seated in a row of chairs set downstage. They were dressed in black leggings and loose gray tops. The individuality of the performers was removed as they completed a well-thought out gestural phrase. They moved in organized unison and canons, manipulating each other and themselves. As the stage wasn't very large, the row of dancers filled the width of the small spotlight. Unfortunately, with such a tight stage, even small changes in props and people had dancers frequently dancing in the dark. At one point, Turner created a visual moment of dynamic levels as one dancer stood on a chair, three stood on the floor around her, and one was seated. I would have liked to see the chairs utilized for level creation more frequently throughout the work.

The dancers then reset the solid row of chairs and returned to their comfortable gestural phrase. Suddenly, the music began to beep, and I knew the next few moments would be a game changer for the remainder of the work. A dancer in an orange shirt entered. She paired with one of the gray-dressed dancers, while the group remained seated. During the duet, the gray-dressed dancer peeled off her tunic and revealed a bright colored shirt underneath. The idea of individuality began to catch on. It reminded me of the movie *Pleasantville*. One by one the dancers partnered with another and removed their grey shirts until only one remained still in grey. The lone holdout sat in her chair, surrounded by her former comrades, as they physically picked on her. All other chairs and gray shirts were strewn across the floor. The last dancer eventually broke free from the conformity. The dancers' former identities were completely abandoned. Lights came down as all six dancers struck a different pose, though I do not think all of the poses made sense. One dancer was on the ground and supported the chair from underneath. While it created an interesting visual, the chairs were never picked up during the work. The pose felt uncomfortably forced in the context of the movement and prop work.

Despite small lighting setbacks, this was one of Turner's best pieces of the night. It accomplished the description set forth in the program notes, which stated the piece explored the trends of conformity and automatization. I enjoyed the resistance between dancers as they struggled to maintain or shed their conformity.

In intimate performance spaces, it's important to keep the audience in mind. The audience can see everything and that is not limited to strictly movement. The audience notices the connection (or lack of) between the dancers either on stage or to the audience. During most of the company's pieces, I wanted to feel included in the experience, but I did not. While I understand that it is often easier to focus above a group of people that is sitting at such close range, I still want to be engaged. A large part of creating that relationship lies in facial expressions. While one or two of Turner's dancers had my attention throughout the evening, the others were blank slates. Only during the very last solo (*IV. She*) at the very last moment, did the soloist smile. Perhaps that was a choreographic decision. But prior to that, she carried little emotion on her face. It was not clear what I was supposed to interpret and I felt lost.

Usually, I would not comment on the behavior of the audience. However, there was a lack of dance-viewing etiquette and I couldn't help but wonder if the dancers felt the same way I did. If you have decided to spend the evening supporting the arts, I commend you. Your patronage means the world to those who perform and those who create. Their dreams are largely made possible because you are there as a witness.

When attending a performance, there are some unwritten rules. Please remain seated during a piece. It's distracting to the dancers and fellow audience members to get up and leave. My focus was broken several times due to this. Please don't check your phone during a work. No matter how low the brightness setting is, everyone is able to see you. If the house lights are dimming, it means the next work is about to begin. Please don't use that time to start a new conversation. Your purpose in the moment is to see the show. It's a time to be completely enveloped in the artistry and creativity of a dancer. Please respect the time, effort, dedication, stress, heart, and soul that go into putting on a production.

But what the audience I sat with lost in etiquette, it made up for in enthusiasm. Cheers, shrills and exuberant applause rang out each time the lights went dark.

At the beginning of the evening, admittedly, I felt a bit overwhelmed. With 15 pieces on the program and an estimated run time of 90 minutes, there was a lot of modern dance to absorb. I appreciated the addition of other choreographers whose works performed alongside Turner's. As an artistic director, Turner is wonderfully fulfilling her role as both a leader and nurturer. She created several works and provided an opportunity for others to let their own voices be heard. At the end of the evening, I no longer felt overwhelmed. The works, while many, were distinct. They did not blur together, but provided their own story and space. The women of Errant Movement are strong and determined movers and provided a satisfying evening of work for a thrilled audience.