

REVIEW: 'Premiere': A Season-Opening Concert of New Works

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Jack Guidone Theater, Joy of Motion

September 22, 2018

By Val Oliphant



This past Saturday, *Premiere* dynamically launched Joy of Motion Dance Center into its 42nd year in the DMV area. Seven unique works by resident companies and instructors, with styles ranging from contemporary to liturgical to hip hop, showed the audience the range of classes offered at Joy of Motion and a glimpse into which dance companies they may want to catch throughout the 2018-19 season.

In Jocelyn E. Isaac's step dancing piece, "Dutch," dancers entered one at a time while rhythmically patting their thighs like a drum and staring straight ahead. Fierce attitudes and sharp movements were highlighted by a syncopated whipping of their heads to the side.

Lauren Borchard examined the journey into parenthood in her contemporary piece "Take Care." The lights came up on a pregnant woman arduously performing a yoga-like sequence while taking breaks to rub her belly. She was joined by two other dancers who alternated between child-like movements, bumping and pulling each other, and then supporting her on either side as she rested her head on their shoulders.

Seven tap dancers dressed in various shades of black and blue imparted an uplifting feeling, their smiles growing as they completed increasingly harder footwork in Michelle Michael's "Bluebird." In combination with the soft piano music punctuated with sounds of tinkling glass, the dancers looked and sounded like rain falling on a tin roof as they moved into different formations that allowed each to be equally highlighted.

“Big in Japan” was a theater-dance piece by JOM resident company Uprooted Dance. A woman in a Coca-Cola branded leotard and bright red overalls nervously approached a microphone set center stage, tapping it and asking, “Can you hear me? Is this thing on?” In an Alcoholics Anonymous style confession, she proceeded to tell the audience she was a former child model. Attempting to work through her issues, her dancing featured Fonzie-style finger guns, peace-sign flashing photo poses, and strutting around the stage like it was a Parisian catwalk.

“Where is the *real* America?” was explored in Jasmine Andrews’ hip hop piece to “This is America,” a less violent but similar interpretation of the recent original music video by Childish Gambino. A group, in the guise of Sierra Leonean tourists, entered the stage, asking where the real America — the shiny McDonalds, big fancy houses, and huge football matches America — was. The dancers alternated between a relaxed West African dance style with softly rolling hips, arms undulating like seaweed caught in a gentle wave and harder hip hop movements, throwing sharp elbows and aggressively slapping their thighs.

“Turning Point,” a contemporary piece by Motion X Dance DC, explored light and space as five dancers in blue crop tops and tan pants moved in and out of lines, lit by small handheld lights. Themes of struggle and community were evoked as dancers pushed their partners back with a palm to their forehead, then grabbed them by the foot as they leaned away. Were they restraining or saving them? The handheld lights occasionally moved around into different formations, alternating between old school theater footlights placed around the edge of the stage or flashlights held under a dancer’s chin as if telling a scary story around a campfire.

The show closed with an excerpt from DancEthos’ upcoming full-length liturgical dance interpretation of Handel’s *Messiah*. A reprieve for those looking for *Nutcracker* alternatives this Christmas season, dancers in wide-leg flowing white pants and black tops created pretty tableaux evocative of an El Greco painting.

While a wide range of dance styles and choreographers usually means an equally wide range of quality, each performance in this show was engaging, entertaining and well-executed. The audience happily chatted about the show as they walked over to the adjoining room to enjoy snacks and drinks with the dancers and choreographers.

Photo: “Bluebird,” courtesy Sunday’s on TAP

Valerie Oliphant is originally from Arizona, where she studied dance and international studies at the University of Arizona, including a study abroad dance program in Ghana. She currently teaches pole and aerial dance at Jordin’s Paradise and myofascial release and stretching for Praktika Wellness. She enjoys writing about movement and dance for her personal blog, [move your story](#), and for the DC Dance Journalism project.