

REVIEWS

Nicoll + Oreck

2007-08-21

Carefully Controlled Zaniness

When one does not already know the artists, buying an event ticket at the Boulder International Fringe Festival can be a bit like the lottery, i.e., you never know what you are going to get in return. The Fringe artist selection process is a lottery in itself, and with that lottery they present some amazing artists right along with a few that redefine the word “awful” (all those artists get A’s for effort and bravery). Then, every once in a while, you take a chance and get to unwrap an exquisite gift that totally delights. Such was the case with Nicoll + Oreck’s “Hic + Nunc,” in their Tuesday August 21, 2007 show in the Naropa Performing Arts Center (PAC). But then, once you know one of their choreographers is Claire Porter, of “suitcase fame,” you might raise your expectations.

Nicoll + Oreck are really Jessica Nicoll, Barry Oreck, Mike Durkin, and Laura Livingston, plus two anonymous techies that can cue rolling doll strollers and throw and catch lighted Frisbees in the dark. The Tuesday evening show opened to a welcoming speech by Durkin and Livingston that had all the markings of two Naropa staffers who just happened to get up out of the audience. They provided a humor filled welcome and taught the audience arm movements that would be used to signal emergencies, absolute catastrophes, and “bbelgrquafdrels.” Plus, they required the audience rehearse each signal, as well as pronouncing “bbelgrquafdrels.” Nicoll + Oreck (the real ones) then presented four works with transitions between them ornamented with a hysterical flashlight-shadow show – that was perfect for the huge, white back wall of the PAC – moments of Durkin and Livingston just standing still in the space, or of Durkin and Livingston sitting in the space announcing, “This is a pause. It is a pause. If there were music it would be an interlude. But ... it is a pause.” Two of the four works were choreographed by Nicoll and Oreck, one by Claire Porter and one by Ann Carlson. Nicoll’s and Oreck’s “Native Tongue” was a very short work in which they ran, walked, and related in ways in which they totally depended on each other, as well as in ways when they were totally separated in space and mind. When dependent, there were lifts and catches, which were perfectly executed, and when separate their relationship varied from totally independent, to quick changes in focus that said they sensed the presence of that other person. Claire Porter’s “Couple Walking” had Nicoll and Oreck walking, walking, and walking in any number of ways while they verbally explored where they had walked that day, how they walked, what walking feels like, and on and on. Porter’s choreography had just enough variation to keep the work alive, and those variations were timed perfectly to prevent the audience from starting to think about what they would do

after the show. In Ann Carlson's "Untitled #1" Oreck and Nicoll sat dead pan, side by side on cloth covered stools performing minimalist movement phrases in hands and arms as music from "Marta" by Friedrich Von Flotow filled the space. At any one moment Oreck's and Nicoll's quiet minimalist movement exploded in voice and huge changes in dynamic and kinesphere, only to return to minimalism as the music started over. Gradually they related to each other and kissed only to return to thrusting fists and eventually chaos, hand claps, and yells. Nicoll and Oreck seemed to reluctantly move out into the stage space as they looked longingly at their stools, to which they returned to repeat some of the early movement phrasing.

Oreck's and Nicoll's "Hic and Nunc" began with Durkin and Livingston attaching retractable "dog leashes" to them, which both controlled what they could do and where, and allowed them to move way off balance as they used the tension the leashes provided. The work progressed to the arrival of any number of disembodied doll strollers that virtually took over the space, to blackouts with lighted Frisbees flying from right and left wings, and a pile of strollers behind which Durkin and Livingston held up lighted whirligigs.

Nicoll + Oreck (with Durkin plus Livingston and anonymous techies) are presenting work at the Fringe that varies from stillness, to minimalism, to huge movements that move through almost absolute chaos. The chaos always returns to a minimal, or even absolutely still places to both frame the chaos and let their audiences "rest." All of the performers have an awe-inspiring presence, project their voices to the back row of the audience, have an exquisite sense of timing, and facial expressions that read perfectly from far away. Nicoll + Oreck's "Hic + Nunc" will be presented again on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday August 24, 25, and 26. Times and ticket prices are given at www.boulderfringe.com.

Donald K. Atwood MFA, Ph.D. atwood@worlddancereviews.com

© Copyright World Dance Reviews 2007