

The New Victory Theater

Seán CURRAN COMPANY

the DANCE insider

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Flash Review 2, 3-20: The Perks Stenn & Co. Pull off the Impossible

By Angela Jones
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NEW YORK -- Rebecca Stenn/PerksDanceMusicTheatre, which performed last weekend at Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church as part of Dance Access, somehow manages not only to pull off the impossible but does so with flourish. Getting both highly trained dancers and highly trained musicians altogether in one space seems like a feat, but to also witness their collaboration and seamless play is awe-inspiring. Good live music with dancers and musicians who know how to listen increases the energy of a work tenfold. The musicians not only listened but led, followed and danced. This mix is such an intricate part of Rebecca Stenn's work, I couldn't imagine the dances without it.

Stenn herself is such an engaging actress/athlete/dancer that it is hard not to miss her when she is absent on stage. However, her company is also very strong in both technical ability and presence, so there is hardly a dull moment. The evening was a balanced blend of fast and slow, emotional and athletic, silly and serious.

One of my favorite pieces would have to be the evening's first, "Left of Fall," set to music from Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," which had a beautiful arc and multiple layers, stops and starts, images that stuck and just the right musical choice. The only criticism would be that I wasn't ready for that kind of intensity right after walking off St. Mark's Place. One of the more fun, lively pieces like "Bach's Seats," "Fast Dance." or "Zimzun" would have prepared me more to start being able to register

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what I was really seeing.

The simplicity and beauty of pieces like "The Embrace" and "The Bride" were like deep breaths in the program allowing us to appreciate the drama and athleticism of the other parts of the evening. Stenn has the unique ability to take a simple idea or "trick" and truly create a full and satisfying piece out of it. For example, "InRage" started out as 10 dancers trying to see or hide from something ugly in the distance, but it somehow morphed into a clear sense of human connection and feminine strength without the usual hit over the head.

At the end, the musicians actually become a part of the action during "The Carmen Suites"(to Bizet), which literally turned these familiar tunes on their head. They were able to delicately tango with being absurdist without being absurd. I just kept wondering how the musicians managed to play so beautifully in those contorted positions.

Stenn is a regular contributor to the Dance Insider so there could be some bias here. However, I overheard someone in the audience say how "delightfully old-fashioned" the group was. I think I'd prefer to call them post-post modern. They dare to create dances with meaning and they dare to connect to the audience and their music. It takes guts and it's worth watching.

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