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REVIEW: REBECCA STENN COMPANY

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Photo by Steven Schreiber

L to R: John Mario Sevilla, Rebecca Stenn, Trebien Pollard (jumping), Faith Pilger, with Rachel Golub offstage

## Connections and Origins

*Rebecca Stenn Company uses live music and narrative to personalize a space*

By **SARAH CARLSON**  
Offoffoff.com

How can we connect deeply in this age of fragmented attention and quick paced encounters? How does where we come from confine or define who we are? By acknowledging the past, can we become more authentically ourselves? Myriad questions simmer to the surface in Rebecca Stenn's latest evening of work only to be drawn back into the metaphorical soup. Stenn & Company emerge more as a collective of individuals, ingredients co-existing each with their own agenda rather than as a well-balanced blend of flavors. And yet, with time and occasionally vigorous mixing, a

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meal takes shape; a subtle yet satisfying transformation from discord to understanding, from curdle to cream.

Eyes gazing off into the distance, a couple lingers at the edge of the stage, hovering, hesitant. Slowly they melt into individual movement, spatially intimate, sensing one another's presence but emotionally isolated. In the premiere of *Periphery*, Rebecca Stenn and Eric Jackson Bradley touch periodically but rarely connect. The couple moves in tandem, swept up in a spatial grip that

seeks comfort even as it underscores their distance. A sit that slides off, a side lean that becomes burdensome. Geometric limbs slice the space, slowly carving out a pathway that makes inroads to center stage, but bumps off the surface of one another. And yet the steady gaze remains, impersonal and refusing to linger or acknowledge one another. Instead, eyes are straight ahead evoking a distracted sense of closeness; a look that refuses to acknowledge what is there and avoiding perhaps what is not. This piece resides mostly at the edge; at the edge of discord, at the edge of intimacy, at the edge of relating, of perceiving, of achieving common ground. A solemn ache emerges, a moving transparency winds down into sustained plies that seek stability, grounding, affirmation. A final look, a direct gaze at last achieves its mark suggesting a more hopeful future.

A reprise of 2005's *Blue Print* transports us to a social gathering; an array of suave personalities mingling tentatively. Light shines like sun through an enormous multi-paned window in Dan Feith's organic lighting. Seemingly explicit text overlaps in an eerie repetition: "Home is where one starts from..." But then a complicated, at times confused series of directions suggests that finding home isn't as obvious as we might think.

Stenn enjoys creatively weaving live music to the tapestry of her dances and she does not disappoint here. At first appearing as undifferentiated cast members, Dave Eggar, Rachel Golub and Jay Weissman eventually fall out and take up their cello, violin and bass guitar, respectively. Live music merges seamlessly with pre-recorded strains such that it is unclear, at times, which is which. Later, Bradley manipulates Eggar as he plays, stealing away his cello, interrupting his flow. Threading in and out of Eggar's arms, Bradley repeatedly inserts himself between Eggar and cello as if seeking close-knit communion with the soul of the music, or of

## REBECCA STENN COMPANY

Choreography by: Rebecca Stenn.  
Dancers: Eric Jackson Bradley, Faith Pilger,  
Trebien Pollard, John Mario Sevilla, Rebecca  
Stenn, with music performed by Dave Eggar,  
Rachel Golub and Jay Weissman.  
Music by: Jay Weissman, Dave Eggar, Rachel  
Golub.  
Production design by: Eric Jackson Bradley.  
Art direction by: Eric Jackson Bradley.  
Sound design by: Matthew Yohn.  
Set design by: Jodi Kaplan.  
Costumes by: Eric Jackson Bradley.  
Lighting design by: Dan Feith.

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the player. Lines are blurred in more ways than one: Who is the true manipulator? Who is foiling who? Where does the music end and the dance begin?

Members of the group fall in and out of contact, reaching past one another, bumping bodies, grasping for air. Passionate gestural conversations flare up and dissipate without resolution; group chemistry intensifies but never climaxes, never fulfills. Something is askew. Interactions feel risky; one is tossed, another falls to avoid being hit, another is yanked into a swirling lift that separates soon after it peaks. Suddenly, the room is awash in poetic revelation. "I am from a house that moved every three years"; "I am from a voice waiting to be found"; "I am from myself alone." Voiceovers of the dancers share deeply and purge the space of anonymity, of the invisible barriers to understanding and acceptance.

Although the players "miss" each other repeatedly throughout the program, Periphery and Blue Print ultimately seek radical connection. Stenn and Bradley, joined by the considerable talents of Faith Pilger, Trebien Pollard and John Mario Sevilla, keep us yearning along with them until the end when Bradley separates himself and walks away, calm, peaceful, resigned. Sometimes the most powerful connections reside within the self.

DECEMBER 13, 2007

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