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Dance review

Performances blend insouciance with geometric precision

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Modern dance veterans Mary Oslund and Gregg Bielemeier don't include a program with "The Indie Concert," their latest evening of short dance works, but their choreographic signatures are telegraphed within moments. Oslund's is geometric pure movement slicing through space, arms and legs bending at opposing angles and smooth, elegant phrases sharply arrested. Bielemeier's is insouciance; he's a master at subverting even elegiac movement with sly surprise in a sudden full-body wriggle, at derailing a polished phrase.

For this performance, Oslund and Bielemeier have assembled a savvy, technically refined pick-up company of dancers, and even in Conduit's small performance space, the ensemble movement looks wide and generous. But it's the two solos – Oslund's moody "Anatomica" excerpt, danced by Jessica Hightower, and the semi-improvisatory "or not," danced by Bielemeier – that are revelatory in their mastery of pacing and gesture.

"Anatomica" feels made for Hightower's long limbs and fingers. Tall and elegant, she slices and turns, arm bent, knee flexed. What's mesmerizing about her solo is the contrast between liquid and jagged. Hightower's body spirals organically to the floor, shifts directions fluidly in space, yet her gestures in the midst of all this movement – a simple shoulder shrug or flexed foot, the way her hands shield her head – are pinpoint sharp. Oslund interrupts the flow of movement in increments, plays with speed, and sets it against Katie Griesar and Darrin Verhagen's score of dark and scratchy electronica, bird caws and woozy tango. It all works brilliantly.

Oslund's "Fauna" doesn't allow for a similar inhabiting of the movement. Like its percussive score (by Joe Janiga/VONIGA), the dance is relentless in its trade of bodies and driving pace: quick catlike crouches,

aggressively thrown gestures, and severely angled joints. Her dancers – Rinda Chambers, Matt Kaylor, Jim McGinn, Paige McKinney, and Taylor Alan Young – are well-matched and articulate; you see their individual inflections even in unison movement. Oslund's signature imprint is the stop-action of multiple dancers amid waves of movement; Chris Balo's lighting renders it sculptural, and it saves the dance from looking frantic.

Bielemeier frequently gets pegged as an impish dancemaker, but his work is no less formal or gestural than Oslund's. What always strikes me about Bielemeier's physical wit is its idiosyncrasy. This is not common-denominator, wink-to-the-audience humor, but Bielemeier's singular sense of playful absurdity, a repartee of and on the body.

In "n," a duet for McKinney and Young, Bielemeier's choreographic rejoinders include the music. Dancing to a frenetic-erotic taped sound collage by David Bryant that's a melange of torchy piano, anxious bell-ringing, anthemic chants and zealous gasps and sighs, the pair's luxuriant partnering, wide-flung limbs and hurtles through space carry an almost nostalgic lyricism. The same movement, later injected with a little faun hop, a full-body squirm, or a curled, flaccid hand, stamps the dance with a marvelous peculiarity.

But "or not" is Bielemeier at his most sublime, campy and poignant, set to an uncredited score that includes big tubas, a remix of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," and kabuki-esque whistling. Bielemeier, in black harem pants and ruffled boudoir camisole, simply walks the stage, with big, considered pauses in his motion, body swaying, hands wafting gently behind his back. There's a slight pathos to this big, bespectacled man, head tucked into one shoulder, sleeves dangling ludicrously from the sides of his costume.

Pacing and contrast define this dance. A simple jig becomes increasingly manic. Bielemeier mimes the musical instrumentation, detailed down to the finger. And then he simply fills the space, pliant twists blending with hunched walks, body slicing with one arm held firmly aloft, inventive even in his exit.

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