



SOLOMONS SAYS

By Gus Solomons Jr.

It's refreshing when a new company with convincing artistry and fierce dancing appears on the crowded concert dance scene. Summation Dance made an impressive debut at Baryshnikov Arts Center, February 4-5. Founded by artistic director/choreographer Sumi Clements and executive director/producer Taryn Vander Hoop, both of whom are also dancers, Summation presented a concise 70-minute evening, created over the past year – during and since graduating from the MFA program of NYU/Tisch School of the Arts. (Full disclosure: as an arts professor there, I was one of their dance technique teachers.) Still, so auspicious a commencement merits recognition.

“Keep Your Feathers Dry” comprises three dances – “Fortitudine,” “Whac-a-Mole,” and “No Man’s Landing” – which, according to a eloquent but perhaps overly personal choreographer’s note, chronicle Clements’s emotional journey during the demise of her love relationship, when her Marine Corps boyfriend was deployed to Afghanistan. Rarely does such deeply personal turmoil translate into such objectively powerful dance.

Fearless performing by a cast of strong women brings the work vibrantly to life. The choreography has all the elements of “well-made dances” – expansive use of space, soaring dynamic contrasts with skillful use of silence and stillness, and cohesive development of thematic materials. But these elements of good craft never stultify the kinetic and emotional impact of the work; rather, they amplify them.

“Fortitudine” begins with McMillan, Clements, and Vander Hoop mumbling and poking the air. Yohta Tsagri, at once maternal and menacing, looms behind them. The image establishes the physical power of the distaff troupe, and that force continues to mount through the evening. A pulsing electric collage by Moby, edit, Four Tet, and original music by Kyle Olson supports the action.

In “Whac-a-Mole,” Vander Hoop and Clements in bright sundresses, move largely in unison, vying for power with Angela Curotto, Julie McMillan, and Kristin Schwab, three sultry fem-bots in black lace leotards and slicked back hairdos. Falling to the ground on hips and knees, sliding, and rolling look physically punishing, but the women take it on with relish. The balance of power shifts from one side to the other, until they all finally fall into unison – harmony or perhaps only a momentary truce.

When in “No Man’s Landing” Julie McMillan balances in a squat on one foot for minutes, you’re engaged by the physical difficulty of the balance, you empathize with its obvious discomfort, and its duration allows you to ponder the very notions of endurance and patience. Then, the company – including also Cat DeAngelis, Allie Lochary, Sarah Holmes, and Erin Okayama, in dark tights and mesh tunics – comprises an intrepid female clan, repeatedly hurling themselves in pairs from the wings onto the ground.

The hard scrabbling dancing may not always reveal the emotional nuances of its intentions, but that opacity is more than offset by the passion with which it’s conceived, the commitment with which it’s done and the craft with which it’s assembled. Dynamic lighting by Simon Cleveland and Brigitte Vosse’s textural costumes add authority to the artistry. Summation Dance renews your faith in the power of motion and announces the advent of a troupe to put on your radar.