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REVIEW

ballet.*magazine**ODC Dance*

*'They've Lost their Footing',
'Unintended Consequences',
'In The Memory of the Forest',
'Origins of Flight',
'Hunting and Gathering', 'Grassland'*

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*San Francisco, Yerba Buena
Center for the Arts*

by Renee Renouf



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It really should be titled Three Ladies Who Could, but ODC did have its thirty-eighth season for the past two weekends at Yerba Buena Center's Novellus Theater, featuring dancers who have come to work with those enterprising women since the millennium. There's been quite a parade of worthy alumni; this crop is new since 2002 with Daniel Santos heading the list. Yayoi Kambara, Anne Zivolich and Corey Brady came on board in 2003, followed by Quilet Rarang and Elizabeth Farotte in 2005, followed by Aaron Perlstein in 2006 and Jeremy Smith in 2007. The first season recruits are Vanessa Thiessen, Dennis Adams and Chin-Chin Hsu.

Brooke Byrne clarified my dilemma regarding K.T. Nelson's energetic choreography saying, "She's into jazz as an idiom," and all of a sudden I got it! Seeing Program 2 first, *They've Lost their Footing* is quite like that. Nelson's 2000 season piece is set to Hoven Droven music with its semi-Swedish vocal impulses which she picks upon in rocking, wide stance a la seconde movements, the dancers costumed by Amanda Williams in colored tights and cutesy over tops. Lit by Jack Carpenter, the curtain goes up on Vanessa Thiessen her head against the proscenium arch downstage right, twisting, turning and generally giving herself a hard-headed time. The movements in the body postures described rose and fell with black shoes stomping, heavily. Both music and movement made me wonder whether Swedes might not appreciate this broad application of their



language or folk dance vocabulary, but score and choreography certainly echoed each other. About mid-way through, the music changed but the general tenor remained. There was an extended, literal head-to-head pas de deux between Thiessen and Santos sandwiched within a larger group of the company; both of them well-matched, strong and constant in their attack.

Before that point towards dance left a series of grand jetes and twisting reverse attitude turns demonstrated how strongly grounded Thiessen, Zivolich and Santos are in classical ballet technique, as well as how willing Nelson was to take advantage of that strength.

Unintended Consequences: A Meditation set to Laurie Anderson with Alexander Nichols' lighting and Brenda Way's take on flecked grey tights was a piece which did not linger in my memory but In The Memory of the Forest, created in 2008 as a tribute to her mother-in-law certainly did, with its video by David and Hin-Jin Hodge, memorable lighting and set design by Elaine Buckholtz and Way's use of white in conventionally shaped trousers, blouses and skirts.

Using Yayoi Kambara as the focal escapee, the ensemble moved, essentially running from stage location to stage location, their movements forecast or echoed on the video projections behind, a series of scenes in trees with the dancers rushing from tree to tree, appearing suddenly, streaking across the screen, suddenly vanishing. The grove of trees itself was spindly, faintly green, scarcely inviting, but its degree of established growth and its area of exposure accented the dashing bodies effectively. At the end, as Kambara made her final appearance, the voice of Iza Ehrlich, Way's mother-in-law, could be heard in phrases recounting her escape from Poland in World War II, voice and lighting ending abruptly.

In Program I, Way employed baroque music by Corelli, Schmelzer and Biber for Origins of Flight, a 2008 piece featuring Anne Zivolich and Daniel Santos catching and supporting each other in unexpected ways which also managed to exploit their remarkably classic training. Backed by the company, shivers and quavers to baroque music are unusual accents to the intricate arpeggios on a violin. Way managed to be consistent, however, this side of gadgetry; the music itself was a blessing to the ears.

The middle work in Program I was a 2008 work of K.T. Nelson titled Hunting and Gathering, Using Brian Eno and David Byrne, Nelson has created a pas de trios, the third of which has been shared between Daniel Santos and Quiet Rarang the night I attended. Rarang has to possess one of the steadiest, deepest quatrieme position plie I have ever witnessed. Is she ever strong! If Hunting and Gathering was what it meant, it also conveyed relationship to a marked degree, shared lifting, supporting, and the use of upper and middle stage left in particular. The exploration was shared with Corey Brady and Jeremy Smith.

K.T. 's newest piece Grassland was suitably green in its background with a sense of mid-west spaciousness; costumed by Coeli Polansky, the dancers appeared in the pared-down, bared-body look which locally is de rigueur even in remarkably chill weather. I recall the dancers gave intimation of green stalks shooting skyward, to a commissioned score of Marcelo Zarvos; the ensemble of musicians included two violins, a cello, a viola and Zarvos at the piano. I would have to see it a second time before commenting further.

ODC believes in community and practices it. My life style doesn't mingle much



with what Way and Nelson convey so distinctly, so well, attitudes upon which the youth of today has gained its vision, its energy and some of its direction. I may part company through lack of exposure, but we share respect for well-trained, individual, can-do dancers which ODC has attracted for its continually well-rehearsed, memorable dances, the dancers cohering as a consistently remarkable ensemble. The current crop promises to evoke yet another series of inventive perspectives of today's culture. The area is blessed also with ODC's generosity in permitting its dancers to free lance when not involved in its productions.

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