

Susan Broili Arts

Everything that moves

RAW Well Done

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A Review

By SUSAN BROILI

The title of this evening of five dance solos may be RAW but what happened turned out to be well-done new ventures by established artists Murielle Elizeon, Tommy Noonan, Matthew Young, Renay Aumiller and Megan Mazarick into new territories without the pressure of creating an entire work.

And, they took the audience right along with them on this adventure in which audiences traveled to performance spaces on the first and second floors as well as the basement of The Fruit, a renovated historic warehouse in downtown Durham, NC.

The 90-minute, 6 p.m. program on Friday, Jan. 11 – the first of a five performance run that concluded on Sunday, Jan. 14 – passed quickly and left me feeling energized by the experience.

Murielle Elizeon kicked off the evening on The Fruit's first floor with her solo "Cru, Fragments" to "Kap Kap" a track from French singer Ann O'aro's self-titled 2018 album. This tract, an angry song in Creole about an incestuous father, includes the spoken poetry of *Le corps conquis* and originated in the Maloya music of Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean.

This solo intensified as Elizeon entered a small garage-like space with metal door rolled up. There, on hands and knees, her hip-driven thrusts got faster, more powerful and animalistic, her face covered by a horse mask, as though she were responding in a visceral way – with her body – instead of intellect.

Tommy Noonan announced his entrance in the large area of the same first floor space by turning on a ceiling light. (He and Elizeon are partners in life as well as in dance ventures.) In a program note, he proclaimed that his solo "Knowing / Half Knowing / Not Knowing" "... is neither a work, nor is it a showing of a work-in-progress. It is the real-time development of raw material ... its development requires you as a witness and therefore as a co-creator."

And, witness they did. And, in turn, Noonan paid attention to the audience – especially a little girl seated on the “front row” on the floor with her mother, when the child made percussive sounds with her feet on the concrete floor.

Fearless summed up the overall effect of Noonan’s movements as he calmly executed what might put a less confident and less in shape person in the hospital.

In one smooth seemingly effortless move, he leaned backwards until he wound up on the floor. Another time, he twisted one leg in such an over-extended way, it’s a wonder the leg didn’t break.

Finally, Noonan spoke of his “score, which could not be developed in a studio but required audience members as witnesses/co-creators.

“It’s a score which allows a dancer to know how to approach the unknown,” he said.

In “Gut Reaction,” Matthew Young literally and figuratively ventured into new territory as he performed a solo for the first time in his 17-year improvisation work with others. And, he was just as present, moment-to-moment, as he is in group work.

This time, his “partners” were the props he furnished his stage space with such as a toilet seat, white curtain split in the middle and a black, floor-to-ceiling, pole.

He dipped a toothbrush into the toilet tank’s water and used it to wash his face. He also pulled a glass full of a lemon-colored liquid out of the tank and took a drink.

Another time, as though the pole was a magnet and he was metal, he seemed to suddenly find himself adhered to the pole. He also resembled a chimpanzee as he jumped and wrapped his legs around the pole.

He also had some magic up his sleeve – or rather – in his pants – maybe in pockets he could somehow open in order to create a trickling sound as a few shinny pennies “dribbled” to the floor followed by a deluge of these coins as he sat on the toilet seat.

Live horn playing by the unseen Danny Grewen punctuated Young’s performance. In the past, Grewen has played three different horns at dance performances at The Fruit: a trumpet, trombone and a brass euphonium horn.

Renay Aumiller and Megan Mazarick wound up the evening in separate performance spaces upstairs in The Fruit.

The title of Aumiller’s solo: “Out of the Blue” could be referring to how it occurred to her to encourage the audience to participate in a computer program that would dictate different scenarios for her to spontaneously create through movements and facial expressions. First, the audience was asked to call out body parts and movement qualities from which Dave Yarwood’s computer program picked one body part and one movement quality for each of the eight sections.

In Section 7, a computer-generated woman’s voice asked Aumiller how she planned to deal with the prompts “flowing” and “eyebrows.”

“I’m trying to figure out how to flow my eyebrows,” Aumiller responded.

Aumiller’s sense of humor and her inventive movements made her solo great fun to watch.

Megan Mazarick ended the evening with her performance of “Boundaries” in another performance space upstairs. (She returned to this area last year after living in Philadelphia and abroad for over a decade. This is her first appearance in a Durham Independent Dance Artists season.)

In the program note, she explained that for the RAW program, she was “working with more overtly political subject matter.” She first appeared in a red pants suit, blond wig and black heels but not too high. But she didn’t identify her character until she blurted out: “I’m Hillary Clinton.” She proceeded to show how Clinton had really felt about running twice for President and coming up short. As Hillary, Mazarick brought up Bill Clinton’s affair with Monica Lewinsky and also said she was considering running again in 2020. “I’m about to break the glass.”

After shedding her Hilary clothes, wig, heels and pearls and wearing tights and a sleeveless top, Mazarick alluded to the anxiety of current times but didn’t spell out the source – which I would describe as the worldwide effect of Trump’s reckless, dysfunctional presidency.

She did mention the dictatorship in Hungary as she placed tiny flaps in white putty on the floor as the Hungarian national anthem played.

When a phone rang offstage, she retrieved the red phone with a very long chord. And, it’s Dimitri who “is concerned about something going wrong with a hydrogen bomb,” she said.

At the end, when asked by the man: “How are you?”, she saluted and said: “It’s been a pleasant week so far.” But her facial expression spoke the truth as one side of her mouth grotesquely froze open to one side.