

The Herald-Sun



DANCE REVIEW: Renay Aumiller's 'Blood Moon'

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BY SUSAN BROILI, Dance Review

DURHAM — Renay Aumiller Dances premiere of Aumiller's "Blood Moon" offered an evocative evening of dance Friday at the Cordoba Center for the Arts.

The element of wonder began before the hour-long performance started as dance goers discovered a pearl of a theater space in an oyster of a building: the old, brick tobacco warehouse now known as the Cordoba Center for the Arts.

Aumiller and a host of volunteers created the space with a large, open stage area, sprung floor and seating on risers for around 100 people. The journey to this space seemed like a treasure hunt except that there was no map or sign posts to indicate which entrance or building in the Golden Belt complex.

Nonetheless, a full-house audience found their way to this hidden gem by the time the performance began. During the first section, no signs of aerial work appeared. For a first-time user of this technique, Aumiller resisted the temptation to fill her choreography with it in a show-boating way. Instead, it became a tool of exploration that drew from her ideas and imagination as well as from the multi-faceted talents of her experienced six-member cast: Anna Barker, Amanda Floyd Beaty, Lindsay Leonard, Leah Wilks, Stacy Wolfson and Stephanie Blackmon Woodbeck. None of these dancers, however, had any experience in "flying" yet handled it with aplomb.

In the first section, there was an air of mystery and sense of anticipation tinged with apprehension. Facing the audience, dancers stood, arms by their sides. Their eyes held a distant gaze. Then, one suddenly turned her head to one side so quickly, if you blinked you missed it, and others followed. Dancers assumed a runner's starting stance. And in one slow-motion sequence, all six dancers' movements added up to a beautiful, tumbling quality like rolling ocean waves.

The first sign of aerial work proved so subtle that it had a startling quality when the realization hit. At first, a dancer seemed to be a bit wobbly as though drunk. Then, she moved in an amazing way that did not seem physically possible. Finally, we saw that she was in a harness and rigged to "fly."

Aerial sequences in the rest of this work demonstrated the qualities of control, lack of control as well as being supported.

While in a harness, Amanda Beatty found herself supported, at times, by the five other dancers, who lifted her above them as she bicycled her legs in the air. Another time, a single dancer pushed another in a flying rig so that the flyer's feet reached the wall and pushed off from there. Another time, a dancer supported a flyer so she

could “walk” on the side of a wall.

And, of course, none of the performers wearing the “jump” style of harness rig could have become air-borne without the support and considerable expertise of aerial rigger Andrew Munro.

At times, a dancer tried to control a performer rigged to fly by repeatedly pulling the performer down every time she tried to rise.

Unfettered solo flying proved the most exhilarating — for performers and the audience. There was a sense of the flyer in control of her own destiny by drawing on her physical strength and unique spirit. Amanda Beaty soared. She whooshed from one side of the stage to the other. She performed flips. Leah Wilks, in a tour de force move, bent her knees and spiraled up and down, demonstrating the strength it takes to do this and the grace that makes it art.

In other moves, both Beaty and Wilks suggested struggle and triumph. At one point, Wilks used her arms to propel her upward as though she were a diver trying to surface. In Beaty’s solo, which concluded the performance, her final gesture, a big, swooping of her arms that ended with her hands straight up, suggested breaking free and flying above it all.

GO & DO

WHAT: Renay Aumiller Dancers performs “Blood Moon.”

WHEN: 8 p.m. Saturday, June 6 and 4 p.m. Sunday, June 7.

WHERE: Cordoba Center for the Arts, 923 Franklin St., Golden Belt complex, Durham, NC.

TICKETS: At the door or <http://renayaumillerdances.com>

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