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At Dance Place, choreographers show gifts for improvisation, spiritual movement

Susan K. Galbraith, The Washington Post, 5/20/13



Photo by Brianne Bland

Touch is the major communication tool of Christopher K. Morgan & Artists. As men and women lean, lift, lower, tumble and roll each other around, they rarely depend on visual cues but instead communicate through a language stemming from contact improvisation. This practice grounds the ensemble in its confident placement of weight and balance, lending a stylistic cohesion that is deeply satisfying. Clearly, the dancers trust one another and their material.

Morgan incorporates the architecture of formal dance, which establishes both rigor and line, but without empty posing. He also displays a keen intellectual curiosity, exploring everyday relationship gestures, repeating them and changing tempos, to show how intent and content can seem to change. The touch of a hand on a cheek moves from being a caress to a (jealous) redirecting of another's focus, and then to a (furious) controlling impulse that changes another's (life) arc in "Halcyon."

Morgan also builds in pauses between movements, allowing for meditation; they are like sherbet breaks between courses of rich wine and food that freshen and sharpen the senses.

His choreography is highly accessible, often simultaneously amusing and chilling. In "Selling Out," he has tapped the fresh and talented dancer Lauren Christie who, to the throbbing pulse of Monstah Black, incorporates popular "street" gestures to show us the not-so-subliminal message of "push 'til you drop."

Skybetter and Associates contributed greatly to the evening at Dance Place, particularly in young choreographer Sydney Skybetter's Arvo Pärt piece, "Near Abroad," and the newly commissioned "Eveningland." The dances share a spiritual aesthetic and restrained formality. Dancers Kristen Arnold and Junichi Fukuda led a very fine ensemble indeed.

Galbraith is a freelance writer.