

Dance Review | CityDance Ensemble

## Stories of Life, With Passion in Common

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CityDance Ensemble has made a name for itself in Washington, where it is one of the leading modern-dance troupes. On Friday night at the Joyce SoHo, where the company was making its New York City debut, it presented an impressively varied program of work by nine choreographers, including Doug Varone and Jane Dudley.



Julieta Cervantes for The New York Times  
Christopher K. Morgan performing “Rice,”  
a solo he created.

Passion is what the pieces have in common, as Paul Gordon Emerson, who founded CityDance in 1996, observes in the program notes. And certainly there was passion in the dancers’ resilient athleticism. But can there be passion without heart? For all the performers’ spunky individuality and the choreographers’ intelligence and skills, the evening was strangely chilly, except for two dances.

One was “Rice,” a charming and poignant solo created and performed by Christopher K. Morgan, in which he talks and dances about growing up in Hawaii. As he talks, he washes rice in a fish tank and talks about family rituals having to do with rice, including his childhood task of washing it. As he washed, then and now, he smeared the rice and water on his skin in an attempt to imagine what it must be like to be a blond, blue-eyed school friend, who to his surprise served yellow rice at dinner.

The other dance with heart was “Harmonica Breakdown,” a rarely seen American modern-dance classic choreographed in 1938 by Dudley, who died in 2001. She wore her politics on her sleeve, along with her sense of American history and social movements and her great sympathy with the American worker. Those concerns are glancingly suggested in this piece, a solo that takes its sharp rhythms and quick-shifting travels from its score, Sonny Terry’s potent “Harmonica and Washboard Breakdown.” Delphina Parenti danced it with just the right crispness and distance, as well as a personal piquancy that somehow worked.

In a group dance called “Contained Infinity,” Harumi Terayama adroitly integrated movement with sumptuous visuals, including handsome costumes and video projections that eerily approximated the effect of bodies in light and shadow. The program also included works by Jason Hartley, Eric Hampton, Roger C. Jeffrey, and Kyra Jean Green and Idan Sharabi.