

DANCE REVIEW

Forces of Nature: Lightning, Water, Music and Movement

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A lighthouse guides a ship to safety. A lightning rod diverts a bolt from a structure by providing a direct path to the ground. Still, the opening images of “[Lighthouse/Lightning Rod](#),” a new work by the choreographer Garth Fagan, with loose, exuberant music by the jazz composer and trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, hint at danger as much as at security.



Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

Norwood Pennewell in the premiere of “Lighthouse/Lightning Rod,” choreographed by Garth Fagan, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Dancers, wearing aquatically themed purples and blues, move spontaneously, as if caught in a riptide: with little warning, they change direction, hopping forward on one leg while taking freestyle strokes in the air with a single arm or collapsing and dangling their fingers toward the floor. Without being too heavy-handed, Mr. Fagan shows that the waters surrounding his “Lighthouse,” as the first section is named, are anything but tranquil.

On Thursday evening at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the dance was unveiled, along with excerpts from “[Griot New York](#),” Mr. Fagan and Mr. Marsalis’s heralded 1991 [collaboration](#). The California artist Alison Saar designed the set pieces, which include the strangest lighthouse you might ever see: a sculpture of a woman, nearly as tall as the stage, clasping silver branches.

She is both ominous and comforting, as are the blue thorny branches that poke from the wings in the middle section, “Memories.” As the branch structure is pushed closer to center stage, a man’s head, on its side, comes into view. For “Lightning Rod,” the last section, silver lightning bolts hang above the stage. (They’re as obvious as the dancers’ costumes: black unitards with asymmetrical silver ruffles.)

“Memories” leads with a solo for the always debonair Norwood Pennewell, who begins with a simple walk across the stage. Here the music softens to a muted horn and the sound of brushes whisking a drum. Mr. Pennewell, whose mixture of ease and control in adagio dancing is full of heart, lifts a leg to the side and holds it from underneath his thigh — the movement returns in the next section — and, later, erupts in scissor jumps as his arms rise and fall.

A new section shows Natalie Rogers, Nicolette Depass and Vitolio Jeune moving together while lost in their own worlds. Last, a vignette briefly touches upon racism and slavery with a scene involving field workers and a servant’s being carried off against her will. If “Lighthouse” is pleasant enough — though the longer it persists, the more routine it becomes — “Memories” is choppy and within this ever-shifting landscape, the piece drifts.

Mr. Fagan redeems himself in “Lightning Rod,” which is every bit a closer. The dancers meld their bodies to Mr. Marsalis’s score, with heel walks that accent the hips in serpentine shapes, and split jumps, mirroring the music’s swinging exuberance.

Mr. Fagan has his favorite dancers, but I was drawn — here and in “Griot” — to Sade Bully, whose razor-sharp extension and silky gusto takes the awkwardness out of some of Mr. Fagan’s more static poses and unwieldy transitions. He loves a tilt. He loves an impossible balance. He loves a jump that springs from nowhere. Ms. Bully manages all of that with elegance — the blazing sort.

Garth Fagan Dance continues performances through Sunday at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Avenue, at Ashland Place, Fort Greene; (718) 636-4100, bam.org.

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