

BWW Review: AMERICAN DANCE GUILD Celebrates 60 Years for the 2017 Performance Festival

Caryn Cooper Sep. 14, 2017

On the weekend of September 7-10 2017, the American Dance Guild (ADG) celebrated its 60th anniversary during their annual performance festival at The Ailey Citigroup Theater. This year's ADG Lifetime Achievement Awards went to three outstanding American dance masters: acclaimed and Tony-award winning choreographer, Garth Fagan; dance medicine pioneer and Dean of the American Dance Festival, Martha Myers; and Louis Mofsie, Founding Artistic Director of the renowned Thunderbird American Indian Dancers who have sustained the legacy of indigenous American Indian dances for the past 54 years. The festival is known to bring about choreographers from around the world to one stage in New York City. This year's theme for the festival was "Celebrating Diversity" with the goal of presenting and honoring a broad spectrum of American Dance. The program opened on September 7, presenting the Lifetime Achievement Awards to the honorees. In addition to showcasing 34 artists and companies on the stage, each program concluded with a special tribute to one of the award recipients. I had the privilege to attend the program on Friday evening.

The showcase opened with an excerpt of the piece "Way of Five-Earth" by Nai-Ni Chen. It is based on the ancient Chinese belief that the physical world is made of five elemental energies- wood, fire, water, metal, and earth. I loved the influence of tai-chi movements within the choreography as they switched from quick and sharp to slow and sustained moves, It was very beautiful to watch. Next was "Edge" by Marcia Wardell Kelly. I appreciated the use of lighting as the dancer was lit only by a spotlight on the stage. It looked like they were dancing on the edge of a cliff. It appeared to be as if they were reaching out to the future but afraid to let go of the past.

"Cromeleque" by Benvindo Fonseca was a celebration to life and those who made an impact on his life (past and present). It was a beautiful and meaningful solo for him personally as he shared his life with the audience. "Impromptu" by Claudia Gitelman showed an interesting use of a stool with the choreography. I loved the innovative way of using the upper body and torso. "Masks" by Jeanette Stoner I thought was really interesting. The dancers wore different masks. To me, the masks represented the facade we often portray and the control it has over us.

"Chalk Lines" by C Kernal Nance and Endalyn Taylor was a very moving piece. It talked about the recent rise of police brutality, particularly against people of color. Typically at a crime scene, you may see the outline of a body- chalk lines. Those lines can belong to anyone-even you or me. Despite the chaos and anger that can ensue, it encouraged me to stay positive, but also stay aware as you never know who or where the next incident may occur- as the piece ended in darkness with the sounds of gun shots. "On The Brink of Time" by Bella Lewitzsky was a fun dance playing around with the idea of time. It can go fast, it

can go slow. As time goes on, things change or they can repeat. Time keeps going, until it stops.

The program concluded with a special tribute to Garth Fagan, who is most notably recognized for choreographing "The Lion King" on Broadway. Dancers from his company performed "No Evidence of Failure" by Mr. Fagan himself. I love the sounds of the Caribbean islands in the music. What strength these dancers have to be able to hold different long extensions for such a long period of time! They also move with amazing fluidity.

What a lovely performance. I appreciated the theme of diversity- particularly now when our differences tend to be the things to separate us, rather than unite us. Thank you ADG for putting together a great line-up of artists for this year's festival. And here is to another 60 years!

The American Dance Guild is committed to supporting artists and bringing the dance community together. It was built on the foundation of creating a collective to support the creation, presentation, and education of dance to benefit all. ADG has served the dance field in many different scopes over the past 60 years through various conferences, festivals and publications. To learn more and to support the ADG, please visit their website at www.americandanceguild.org.