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Garth Fagan Dance, Joyce Theater, New York – review

By Apollinaire Scherr

Norwood Pennewell's 'Gin' was impressive, while Fagan's 'No Evidence of Failure' was happiness-inducing



Vitolio Jeune in 'Gin'

No wonder this year's premieres from Garth Fagan Dance feature Natalie Rogers, with the company since 1989. Like many older artists, Rogers, 51, imbues her art with a clarity and urgency that make questions of the beautiful and the ugly feel small and beside the point. In an art form that often resorts to pretty muteness, Rogers's steps speak.

Hers is only one of many solos in Norwood Pennewell's impressive third foray into choreography. The veteran dancer and rehearsal director wears his membership in the School of Fagan proudly, but the multipart *Gin* pushes to extremes Fagan's trademark alternation between stillness and speed – impulsive energy and strong, clear lines. Skittery sections skid into slow, stationary passages. Where Fagan camouflages solos within groups, Pennewell clears the stage for them. Emotionally, *Gin* is more opaque than Fagan; structurally it is more clear cut.

As for Fagan's *No Evidence of Failure*, the duet gives us Rogers through and through. Fagan's duets are so heartening about romance and so lovingly particular to the specific players that I wish he made more of them. And yet they share the same values as the ensemble pieces, which lay people and sections *next to*, not on top of, each other.

The duets also emphasise autonomy – the dancers introduced individually before they hook up. *No Evidence of Failure* began with a long solo for Rogers of searching and repose. She leapt from foot to foot like a hopscotcher. She duck-walked (shades of Chaplin). She glued her big, beautiful, intense eyes on the distance as she froze on one leg; she laid her cheek on her arm like Picasso's sleeping woman as she balanced on the other. She played like a child but rested and waited like her own mature self.

The explosive, dramatically nuanced Haitian émigré Vitolio Jeune, two decades her junior, had an introductory solo too. The quest was hers, though, even if their duet was an equal exchange. They balanced together, grazed cheeks and pressed foreheads. She fitted in his

hollows and perched on his limbs. Like so much of Fagan, the moves were straightforward yet startlingly novel. And so, suggests *No Evidence of Failure*, is each true love. This dance induces happiness.



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