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DANCE REVIEW

Tap's Present and Future, in a Meeting of Minds, Hearts and Feet

'Rhythm in Motion,' Tap Dance at 14th Street Y



Rhythm in Motion Michela Marino Lerman (in white) and other members of Michelle Dorrance Dance performing Ms. Dorrance's "We Came Here to Do One Thing" as part of a presentation of the American Tap Dance Foundation at the Theater at the 14th Street Y.

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On Sunday, near the start of "Rhythm in Motion," the second of two shows that the American Tap Dance Foundation presented at the Theater at the 14th Street Y, the event's director, Tony Waag, made an announcement and gave a warning. The announcement: All nine of the works on the program had been created within the last year at his American Tap Dance Center. The warning: The show would be "a bit moody."

Moody it was, mostly in the best sense: deeply sad, frustrated, wistful, joyous, expressive of a wider range of emotions than you might expect from a tap showcase. Though the

program had flaws, for an organization devoted to the health and development of tap as an art it was a vindication, a triumph, a knockout show.

In “The Dark Tunnel,” Cartier Williams set himself and three other young dancers into slacker postures for Radiohead’s “Creep.” Their pummeling of the music had a paradoxical sensitivity, succeeding where many have failed in matching tap to rock. When the music changed to Nina Simone, Mr. Williams borrowed beautifully from the balletic side of current street dance. Cycling through styles to depict a search for identity, he skirted cliché but nevertheless announced himself as a hotshot hooper turned choreographer of promise.

Kazu Kumagai’s hometown in Japan was devastated by the earthquake and tsunami of 2011. That he lost family and friends could be felt in his solo, “Far Away From Home,” which surged from tiny, quick delicacy to stamping insistence. His unadorned dancing, combined with a few video images of the disaster’s aftermath on a screen behind him, was enough to wrench the heart.

The few images of flowers and babies in Mr. Kumagai’s piece were too much. But Max Pollak suggested the continuation of life more subtly with “Sakura,” his reimagining of a Japanese folk song about cherry blossoms. Both this and Mr. Pollak’s subsequent Cuban number, “El Guararey de Pastora,” were unusual in that the four dancers from his company, Rumba Tap, were mostly percussive support for four singers doing gorgeous, rhythmically complex arrangements in four-part harmony.

Mr. Pollak did break out in a virtuosic tap solo. Responding to killer scat singing by Dylan Pramuk he incorporated air guitar and, for his daughter’s birthday on Sunday, did her favorite step: a wiggling of the knees. Moodiness did not preclude fun.

Nor did it rule out kooky experimentation. Brenda Bufalino’s “Bufalogium Cortege #1” was a trip back to the avant-garde of the 1950s and ’60s. Four women in sweaters wandered around looking scared or hostile and tapped three-part counterpoint to Charles Mingus jazz. Ms. Bufalino, a veteran choreographer, tapped with lullaby sweetness to Erik Satie and recited a poem about the parade passing her by — this cliché redeemed by craft and eccentricity.

Michelle Dorrance’s “We Came Here to Do One Thing” closed the show with a live rendition of the standard “Nature Boy” and Radiohead’s “Everything in Its Right Place.” As the central figure, Michela Marino Lerman combined her usual high skill with

unusual emotional openness. Around her Ms. Dorrance sent dancers circling, holding down the beat in a manner at once inviting and threatening.

Ms. Dorrance's dance was affecting though inconclusive. She calls it a work in progress. Yet the whole of "Rhythm in Motion" suggested a less tentative conclusion about where the American Tap Dance Foundation is helping to take tap. It looks and sounds like the right place.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/28/arts/dance/rhythm-in-motion-tap-dance-at-14th-street-y.html?smid=pl-share>