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Mark Haim Challenges and Charms at On the Boards

by StefanDW on March 31, 2012

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This weekend Mark Haim delivers two minimalist pieces at On the Boards (through April 1) that deal with time and the entirety of the human lifespan. These dances challenge and ultimately leave audiences charmed.

The first half of X2 begins with a long stillness, one dancer stands (Hendri Walujo), another sits. As action fills the space there is a suggestion of character with Walujo as he is the only dancer who always moves in direct relation to others. Costuming and choreography also suggest relationships, but none of these suggestions carry through to the rest of the piece. Relationships form and dissipate with limited impact among the ensemble.

The intellectual can easily dominate this first part of the evening. The extraordinary subtlety of the changes and looseness of the relationships and other larger patterns drives one to work to make sense of the piece on a philosophical level. But there are strong emotions tied to this dance, notably in Beth Graczyk's long solo. Acts of madness, passion, and aggression fill the time without making a conclusive structure. This nebulous aspect of the piece feels authentic even as it lacks drama.

Sudden shifts in tempo suspend the attention. Were we close enough to touch the dancers we might notice the changing tension in their muscles or a bead of sweat forming and beginning its own dance. In OtB's deep proscenium we are more likely to drift from the dancer to notice that the set has changed, the lights have shifted, and the world of this dance is not as it appeared.

How could we have been so blind not to notice these changes? But then how much of our lives and those around us are we blind to every moment? Haim leads us, like the dead of Our Town, to long for another chance to notice the wonder of all that recently seemed beneath our regard.

Based on a 20-minute presentation from OtB's NW New Works Festival in 2010 (where it was titled This Land is Your Land) X2 Part 2 features dancers and non-dancers in variations on the most simple of dance movements. While the first half of the evening works the brain, the second half provokes more emotionally. This is due in no small part to the simplicity of the piece and its performers. The non-dancers go a long way to winning the audience with their honesty and bravery, and the props and costumes that add meaning to the movement aren't out to deliver depth. The

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audience is moved to laughter, awe, and even a little political prodding.

In its final moments *X2* reminds us of the value of childlike joy, a theme also found in the first half of the evening. We see that joy played out alone before intermission where it feels almost coercive. In the final scene, contextualized in a kind of movement version of the *Seven Ages of Man* and without the adulterating suggestion of import, that brief time of childhood is simply joyful.

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