12 May 2017

Concert Critique of

*Newton’s Cradle*

By Tiffany Rea-Fisher

For the Academy of Visual and Performing Arts Dance Company

Featuring 8 Dancers: Brielle Castaldi, Kierstyn Edore, Karina Goussev, Rachel Orji, Susan O’Sullivan, Jolie Schaub, Leah Suskind, Emily Singer

Performed to Music by Jessica Pavaone

At Dragonetti Auditorium

With Lighting by Ahmed Bennane

The 2017 Morris County School of Technology Academy of Visual and Performing Arts May Dance Concert was breathtaking. I am so sad it is over but I am so happy that it was a success. Although, I loved every dance, one dance, *Newton’s Cradle* by guest artist, Tiffany Rea-Fish was particularly stunning.

I interpreted *Newton’s Cradle* to be about momentum and energy. Originally, I believed it to be an abstract piece but with further research into the title, *Newton’s Cradle*, the choreographer’s intent became more and more clear. Newton’s cradle is a system of hanging balls that demonstrates the law of conservation of momentum and kinetic energy. As one ball swings and hits the other four, the energy is transferred through the middle balls (which appear to stay still) and shoots the ball on the opposite end out to swing the same distance as the original ball fell from, and swings back to repeat the scenario. I believe the choreographer’s intent was to portray the idea of energy transfer and for the dancers to embody both the balls in the system and the energy in the system. I studied these concepts this year in physics and it is very interesting to watch the dance again and spot moments where energy is transferred from one dancer to another or how the dancers move together as a system and connect it to physics. Wow! Great connection and investigation into title

The dance intrigued me. Rea-Fisher succeeded in creating great suspense with silent moments and slow movement. This suspense, in addition to strange, original, movement made me feel pleasantly uncomfortable throughout the dance. “Pleasantly uncomfortable” means that I was uncomfortable, however it was clear to me that Rea-Fisher’s intent was for the audience to be uncomfortable throughout the piece, so I felt good about the fact that it made me uncomfortable.

The costumes consisted of bright green, pink, black and grey. Some wore green tank tops with grey overshirts and black shorts. Others wore grey leggings with pink tshirts. To me, I did not feel that they helped convey the message of the work. The costumes seemed out of place and as if their bright colors and workout-esqe style belonged with a happier or faster dance. However, maybe the fact that they seemed out of place added to the choreographer’s intention of discomfort. Also, they were simple and did not distract from the moment, so perhaps that is how they helped convey the message of the work: by directing all focus onto the dancers who clearly convey the message through their movement and none on the costumes themselves.

The lighting of the piece was simple but dark. The little light onstage was tinted yellow and at the climax of the piece, there is a white circle spotlight onstage. The lighting gave the dance a sense of warmth, sophistication and contrast. The dance has a sense of little exposure, as if the choreographer is showing us a portion of something greater which adds intrigue. The deeply contrasted lighting adds to this suspenseful tactic of showing minimal information to the audience.

The music by experimental musician Jessica Pavone was incredible. Towards the beginning of the piece, the instruments heard were very traditional and included violins and other orchestral string instruments such as cellos and violas. As the dance developed, synthesizers, and electronic sounds such as static were added to the music. The musical was an integral portion of this dance.

The dance began with the eight dancers grouped center stage center. They moved only on the fragmented sounds with extraordinarily poised and lifted original movements partnered with long stillness in stoic postures between the sounds. This seemed incredibly difficult because it required extremely sharp focus. The dancers pulled it off.

The piece developed and introduced floorwork and partnering. Rea-Fisher juxtaposed rigid poses and fluid movement by having two still dancers on the floor, who only change position when manipulated by the smooth dancers around them. Nice description and observation. This was a great moment that depicted the conservation of momentum that I believe the dance is about. The statue-like floor-bound dancers only moved with the energy from the moving system of dancers around them.

Another great moment that depicts the idea of Newton’s Cradle comes next. The dancers flicked their bodies in unison with the single violin notes heard at this time. This allowed them to travel into two different groups of four, both facing their respective centers. The two dancers most upstage of their groups represent energy and controlled the movement of the three others in their groups who represent the balls in Newton’s system. The transfer of energy between the two groups was demonstrated by fantastic level changes. As one group fell towards the other, the other group reacted by falling the same direction. Now this group held the energy and came back to standing as the energy was transferred to the other group which fell away. Watching this, the audience was able to see the wave of energy that seemed to pulse through all the dancers’ bodies.

The dance ended with a long, large, ensemble phrase that was filled with movement that can be described with no other word but specific. Each movement was very clear about which positions it passed through and where it ended. This was vital because the music playing was virtually impossible to count. The dancers had to move slowly and specifically to stay in unison. They moved in unison until stillness appeared in the dance more and more and different groups moved into different poses at different times, alternating stillness. The final movement was a unison transition into an open and large posture with outstretched arms and legs, as the music faded.

Tiffany Rea-Fisher succeeded in creating a conceptually stimulating and avant garde piece about energy. I thoroughly enjoyed watching *Newton’s Cradle* in the weeks before the concert and witnessing it come to life onstage.