

LESS IS MORE

Picasso said, "Art is the elimination of the unnecessary." How often do I wish more choreographers would take that to heart. Of the trio of performances that I saw mid-February, only one of them succeeded in heeding that advice.

Batsheva Dance Company

Last Work

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Theater, San Francisco

February 15, 2017

Batsheva Dance Company, presented by San Francisco Performances, showed Ohad Naharin's *Last Work* on Wednesday, February 15 at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Theater.

This latest work by the company's artistic director has to be one of the most satisfying productions I've seen in a long time. Naharin doesn't set out a narrative line that makes for easy digestion of the material. Instead, he creates a Rorschach environment of movement, music/sound and light which acts as a catalyst for our collective and individual imaginations. Once triggered, our reactions become material from which we invent our own stories, recall past events in our lives, imagine what it would be like to be in someone else's shoes – then we see how those feelings resonate with what is happening on stage. The broad range of the human condition is the warp and weft of *Last Work*. This microcosm of a tapestry is embroidered with a series of duets, solos, and large group unison sections.

A lone woman in a blue dress runs on a treadmill upstage for the entire seventy-five minutes of the piece, and is the only constant in the ebb and flow of dancers appearing out of the panels on each side of the stage. These dancers are not virtuosic in the traditional sense applied to dancers, but are brilliant not only in the amazing fluidity and strength of their bodies, but also in imbuing their physical skills with the utmost dedication to emotional authenticity. In fact, these two elements are inseparable in a true dance artist.

In the beginning, the solos and duets seem like random, isolated events, then they gradually coalesce into larger groups, which perform sections that feel like secret rituals. The music parallels this evolution, moving from an abstract thrumming, buzzing ambient noise to a gentle wash of something more tonal and finally to actual chants/songs. By the end, the action is decidedly structured and not in the least bit abstract. The compelling intentions of the dancers and their ability to engage the viewer never relents or flags and leaves us in a state of complete surrender to the power of art, wanting more and yet feeling the need to retreat and spend a long time digesting the entire experience.