

Pigeonwing Dance Creates a Rigorous Language of Its Own



By Morgan Beckwith
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“Ours is an age bedeviled by the urge — an urge bearing the ominous compulsiveness of addiction — to reduce, flatten, and simplify what is more expansive, dimensional, and complex than can be easily understood. Too often, we choose this ease — the ease of reflexive reactions and instant opinions — over the difficult but nourishing work of consideration.”

– Maria Popova on the writings of Rebecca Solnit

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On Saturday, March 10th Pigeonwing Dance offered up an evening of flavorful expression. Artistic Director Gabrielle Lamb presented a combination of old and new choreographic work as a part of the Harkness Dance Festival at the 92Y.



Chelsea Bonosky in “Torricelli’s Theorem”. Photo by Julie Lemberger.

Up first was the delightfully thoughtful “Torricelli’s Theorem”. In a physical examination of Torricelli’s Theorem of fluid dynamics, soloist Chelsea Bonosky manipulated the patterns and positioning of a series of beakers, with and without liquid, that were strategically placed throughout stage right. An ominous glass orb hung from the ceiling as droplets of water fell from its bottom, effectively keeping time. Bonosky was either utterly absorbed in her task of rearranging and shifting liquid or eating up space with movement sequences on stage left. The whole scene had the makings of an obsessive compulsive’s stream of consciousness. It was utterly mesmerizing. In a satisfying and witty conclusion, Bonosky finished her tireless movements by drinking the very water she had been so precious about preserving.

The premiere of “Pathological Curves” brought on a smile and a sense of intrigue. Christine Darch produced inspired dual purpose costumes for this duet. An a-line dress and long sleeve shirt printed with a beautiful agrarian scene acted as both costumes and backdrop.

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Jane Cracovaner and Patrick O'Brien in "Pathological Curves". Photo by Julie Lemberger.

Pre-recorded, yet full-bodied, bluegrass folk music accompanied Jane Cracovaner and Patrick O'Brien's complex, and at times amusing, relationship. Moving in and out of attraction, curiosity, and maybe even disgust, the pair had an electric partnership. Their eloquent execution of Lamb's sinuous choreography had a lasting effect.

Crafted in response to Rebecca Solnit's writings on human feats of resourcefulness and altruism in the wake of disaster, "Bewilderness", reckoned with these types of community relations, albeit in the abstract. Lamb began the piece by disrupting the edges of the stage. A group of disembodied hands poked out from the upstage curtain while a perplexed and dismayed dancer attempted to pull them apart from one another, a seemingly fruitless task. And this sense of anxiety continued, with duets and groups interacting in phrases of movement that both undulated and segmented the dancers bodies, creating intricate sequences of tableaux. Here Lamb used form, manipulation of speed, and physical connection to draw out intensively expressive moments of the human condition without relying on overly theatrical elements.



Dancers from Pigeonwing Dance in “Bewilderness”. Photo by Charles Roussel.

This understated elegance of form woven throughout all of Lamb’s work conveyed incredible degrees of feeling—the direct result of the strength of her choreographic development and the dancers commitment to her movement. Lamb’s subtle and thoughtful use of the theme and variations model was constantly evolving and kept leading the audience back to her commentary on the human condition. This subject, and the movement conversation surrounding it, was something everyone in the audience seemed to be craving.

