



Photo: Paula Lobo

Paramodernities (West Coast Premiere)

A Series of Dance Experiments

Netta Yerushalmy
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Project
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Netta Yerushalmy made a stunning San Francisco debut with an abridged version of her “Paramodernities.” This sophisticated six-part series will have its world premiere at Jacob’s Pillow Dance

Festival this August. Three of these parts were presented for the ODC performance, each deconstructing landmark modern dance choreographies: Vaslav Nijinsky's, "Rite of Spring" (1913), Alvin Ailey's "Revelations"(1960) and Merce Cunningham's various works (1968-1991), in a multidisciplinary performance of seven dancers with live presentations by scholars from varying fields of the humanities, including local dance legend Margaret Jenkins; Open Space Editor-in-Chief at SFMOMA, Claudia La Rocco; professor of Theater & Performance Studies at Stanford, Jennifer DeVere Brody; dance researcher and writer Thomas F. DeFrantz and philosopher and author David Kishik.

These arty, erudite presentations help to position and decode these iconic works within the larger perspective of Modernity. Additional readings and exposés were made by dance researcher and writer Thomas F. DeFrantz and, philosopher and author, David Kishik. Collectively these commentaries unravel the underpinnings of racism, feminism, homophobia, and nihilism found within these popular dances as artifacts of the times in which they were created. If this sounds heady, it is, but in an entertaining anarchistic fashion. Yerushalmy contrasts these scholarly and poetic commentaries with specific dance phrases and styles from these renowned choreographers, reinterpreting their order and reshuffling them into dance bites without music.

"Paramodernities" is held together by equally sophisticated dancing by seven accomplished New York City dancers. The structure that it employs is clearly adaptable even though each section is tightly set. Dancers have the freedom to improvise a conversation between them or with the audience; the audience is encouraged to ask questions, they are also moved from riser seating to in-the-round; and, the scholars and luminaries who presented during the Merce Cunningham section will be different presenters with original material each performance. Yerushalmy

also reserves the right to arrange the segments out of order, playing with chance and manipulating effect.

Paramodernities #1: The Work of Dance in the Age of Sacred Lives” began with its writer (and Yerushalmy’s husband) David Kishik, sitting professorially at a table using the old-school equipment of a slide projector and cassette deck, inserting and then rejecting various cassettes of his prerecorded texts. As he clicked the projector to present another slide, Yerushalmy in all white cutoffs, t-shirt, and elastic knee braces reenacted the signature moves of Nijinsky’s “The Rite of Spring.” As his narrative posed an alternative history of dance focused on the politics of conformity in ballet and the standardization of movement as a form of domination. This defiantly nerdy download of information became like an overpowering soundtrack, intentionally upstaging Yerushalmy who pounded her feet, and created right angles with her forearms, à la Ballets Russes, in an evocation of Nijinsky’s moves in the performance that sparked a near-riot at the 1913 premiere of “Rite of Spring”, which arguably launched the age of Modernity.

In “Paramodernities #4: An Inter-Body Event”, Brittany-Engel-Adams, with her teased-out afro glorifying her commanding presence and striking face, retraced the choreography of Merce Cunningham. Marc Crousillat completed this dynamic duo that was flawlessly complementary, intensely focused, and playfully relaxed. To their precise and repetitive movement, Margaret Jenkins, who danced with Cunningham told a story about him; Claudia La Rocco read a poem written for the occasion, “...The body exalted. The body breaking. Here we go again...” And Jennifer DeVere Brody, rapidly read a litany of quotes as her response addressing everything from space, time, and income inequality. One of the striking features of these readings, besides the content of each and the why they related or didn’t to the

dance, was that it was the first and only time the presenters would hear the other's material.

The provocative "Paramodernities #3: Revelations The Afterlives of Slavery" ended this brainy evening and was danced by a majority of the ensemble. Genderbending Stanley Gambucci started this section as the one before it was ending and intermission began. Gambucci who seems to be giraffe tall elegantly loomed above the others, the way Judith Jamison height and eloquence commanded the stage in the early years of "Revelation." Thomas F. DeFrantz passionately read a lilting rant on the social-political-afro-homo issues that imprint dance, asking, "How does the modern, as a conceptual mechanism, make space for Blackness, Africanist aesthetics?... Are these modernities of the body always white?" In perfect unison the dancers moved around him or moved with him, all clad in costumes that looked reminiscent of costumes from "Revelations."

Netta Yerushalmy's "Paramodernities" is to contemporary dance what fellow Guggenheim award winner Taylor Mac's "A 24-Decade History of Popular Music" is to popular music. Both deconstruct laissez faire naïveté of cultural assumptions; both give attention to the queer voice, their contributions to society and their suppression throughout modern history. And both match sharp intelligence with fluid unconventional performance, demystifying the arts along the way and proving that perception, like gender, is multifaceted.

David E. Moreno