

ENTERTAINMENT

“Underground” digs into protests

By **KYLE MACMILLIAN** | The Denver Post

March 1, 2009 at 1:09 pm

“Does what you do make a difference?”

That is the first of a few dozen questions spoken from the stage and/or projected onto a giant rear screen Saturday evening at the Newman Center for the Performing Arts in New York choreographer David Dorfman’s “underground.”

The fast-action multidisciplinary piece looked at the legacy of 1960s protests, especially those of the violence-prone radical group, Weather Underground, through the lens of the Internet age and examined what activism means today.

Songs by groups M83 and Broken Social Scene as well as wordless, often intense music by Jonathan Bepler powered an ever-changing projected backdrop, with graphs, bold graphic effects and a patchwork of photos and videos of ’60s protesters.

The 10 members of David Dorfman Dance (including the choreographer himself) sometimes punctuated and responded to what was on the screen. Other times, they were the center of attention, with recurring movements inspired by protests — fists in the air, hands behind the back as though handcuffed and the throwing of imaginary rocks.

In some of the most effective moments, as many as 52 volunteer community dancers (demonstrating a kind of activism of their own), amazingly well-rehearsed in just four sessions, swept back and forth across the stage, suggesting the swarming, throbbing quality of a crowd on edge.

The piece can be frustrating, because it never really makes a point or takes a stand. While Dorfman’s nostalgia for the ’60s (he was 13 during Chicago’s Days of Rage in 1969) and his leftist leanings are obvious, he refrains from asserting any ideology or point of view.

Instead, the work pokes. It prods. It sends a call to action, a plea to do something, but Dorfman leaves the form of that something to the audience.

Running about 45 minutes, the piece seemed a bit short and curtailed, given its ambition and scope. At the same time, it never really connected emotionally – touching the heart or slamming the gut.

But, later, on the drive home, images and ideas from the piece kept coming back to my mind, making me realize that “underground” had achieved its central purpose – getting me to question my life.

Has what I’ve done made a difference?

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