

DANCE | DANCE REVIEW

A Shot of Political Urgency on an Outdoor Double Bill

By GIA KOURLAS AUG. 25, 2008

On Thursday night at Damrosch Park, the scent of patchouli oil wafted generously in the air. Bill Bragin, the director of public programming at Lincoln Center, introduced the evening's double bill of a musician and a choreographer with a fitting — and, for some, squirm-inducing — description of their artistic intent: social activism.

The program began with the musical group, Toshi Reagon and BIGLovely with Bernice Johnson Reagon, expressing outrage at the current American political climate through rousing songs. David Dorfman Dance filled out the second half with a piece called “underground.”

The dance, from 2006, begins with Mr. Dorfman performing a loose-limbed prelude. Wearing floppy layers, he lunges forward with one knee bent and the opposite arm held ramrod straight with a clenched fist. He skitters backward, flips onto his side and dashes to the front of the stage to throw an invisible object toward the crowd — most likely a bomb.

The radical Weather Underground group of the 1960s and '70s inspires Mr. Dorfman, a native of Chicago, in his dance. At one point he recites, in the form of a letter, some reasons for his adoration of the risks that its members took. But as a professed pacifist, where does their violent form of activism leave him now?

There are a great many questions posed in “underground” — about the apathy of a generation and the justification of a right to kill — and these are frequently punctuated with dancers stopping in their tracks to raise a fist in the air. “What do you do to make a difference?” a dancer asks in anguish. “What would you do?”

Jonathan Bepler’s searing rock score remains the best part of the production, but the repetitive and underdeveloped choreography, featuring dancers running in circles or crossing the stage with far-flung abandon as if fleeing the scene of a protest, offers little in the way of variety.

Mr. Dorfman likes to chat with the audience after a show — he does so with a graciousness few can attain in such situations — and his appearance at Lincoln Center Out of Doors was no exception. He maintained that art exists to ask questions, not to answer them.

While that may be true, the questions raised in “underground,” along with projected black-and-white snapshots of ’60s activists, clutter this production with so many overly literal concepts that the very idea of activism becomes trite. And unremarkably, it reeks of patchouli.

A version of this review appears in print on , on Page E3 of the New York edition with the headline: A Shot of Political Urgency On an Outdoor Double Bill.

The New York Times

Discover the truth with us. Select the package that works for you.
Choose annual billing and save up to 40% every year. You may cancel anytime.

Basic

\$2.75/week

Billed as \$143 every year

Get basic

Basic Digital Access includes:

Access to NYTimes.com and all NYTimes apps

Unlimited article access, anytime, anywhere

Learn more ►

All Access

\$3.75/week

Billed as \$195 every year

Get All Access

Includes everything in Basic, plus:

Times Insider Access, including behind-the-scenes stories, exclusive events, podcasts, and e-books

1 complimentary digital subscription to give anyone you'd like

Learn more ►

Home Delivery

+ All Access

\$6.93/week

Billed as \$360 every year*

Get Home Delivery

Includes everything in All Access, plus:

Customized delivery options such as Sunday only, Fri.-Sun., weekday delivery, or daily delivery

The weekly Sunday magazine and monthly T Magazine

2 complimentary digital subscriptions to give anyone you'd like

Learn more ►

*Home delivery price based on Sunday delivery.

Prices vary based on delivery location and frequency.

© 2017 The New York Times Company