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DORFMAN HITS THE MARK WITH TWO VERY DIFFERENT PRODUCTIONS

- By Alice Kaderlan Halsey Special to the Seattle Post-Intelligencer

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There are many words that can describe the recent work of choreographer David Dorfman but "sophisticated" is the one that springs most readily to mind.

Like much of Dorfman's previous creations, the two pieces that he brought to Seattle this time feature his signature athleticism and inventiveness. But they also showcase a mature artist whose ability to interweave stunning visual images with an exuberant sense of fun is firmly rooted.

On the surface, "To Lie Tenderly" and "Subverse" couldn't be more different. The first work has a post-modern, minimalist look and a physical style that is jagged and sharp. "Subverse," on the other hand, seems set long ago in a Chinese temple and the movements are flowing and gracious. Yet both works are intensely theatrical with thoroughly integrated music and dance.

This extraordinary musicality, a common trait of ballet choreographers, is something we don't see as often in creators of modern or postmodern dance. They sometimes seem so interested in movement for its own sake that the other theatrical elements, including music, get pushed to the side.

But Dorfman is also a musician and plays a range of instruments, a talent used to great effect in "To Lie Tenderly," with original score by Seattle's Amy Denio. At first glance, it would seem that the powerful whirling and hurling of the dancers should grate against the exotic lilting sounds of Denio's haunting score. But the juxtaposition works.

Dorfman seems to have taken in the energy of the music, allowed it to resonate internally, then thrust it out as gyrating pyrotechnics. The result is an arresting work

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that engages the audience from start to finish.

Equally impressive is the degree to which Dorfman simultaneously explores personal relationships in both their physical and emotional dimensions. While dancers in one part of the stage are verbally interacting with each other, those in another are exploring ways in which they can share or divide a common space. As in "Subverse," he's at his best in ensemble choreography and his six formidable dancers form a dynamic and cohesive troupe.

Perhaps no Dorfman work shows these dancers off to better advantage than "Subverse." It's almost unmatched in the Dorfman repertoire for bravado, drama and flair. From the moment the curtain parts, you know you're in for a treat. The stark black stage is dissected by three striking red fabric columns and the dramatic lighting suggests a mysterious place where ritual is performed.

Against this stark background, Dorfman's powerful dancers, in elegant, flowing dress, explore a range of internalized and externalized emotion, alone and within the group, in an ever-changing tapestry of human interaction. The piece manages to convey genuine emotional content without losing its capacity to provide a dazzling feast for the senses.

For almost 20 years now, David Dorfman has been refining his prodigious talent. It is profoundly rewarding and incredibly exciting to see him hit his mark dead on.