

UO's modern dance choreography shines

Faculty and students display outstanding technique and exceptional stage presence

Sunday, Feb. 14, 2016,

Bravo to the University of Oregon faculty and students for a stunning performance before a sold-out house on Thursday in the Dougherty Dance Theatre.

The evening was filled with true modern dance choreography by six top-notch dance faculty members and danced by a bevy of outstanding students, who used exceptional technique and displayed significant stage presence.

The evening opened with "In the Pocket," remarkably choreographed by two graduate teaching fellows, Bryant Henderson and Lindsey Salfran. Ten dancers dressed in black, including black jackets with a touch of sequined color on each pocket, moved to the jazz piece "Sing, Sing, Sing" with gusto and humor. Well done.

"Anatomy of a Tropical Home," with choreography by faculty member Brad Garner, was a unique piece. Six dancers were featured on the stage with black-and-white industrial construction animation projected on the back wall. Dancers' black profiles appeared larger than life adding shadow dancers to the group. Beautifully controlled movement drew us into the story to music by Jason Kao Hwang and Ayman Fanous.

The highlight of the evening was Walter Kennedy's reconstruction of "Song of Woman" (1983) by Bella Lewitsky. Kennedy was a soloist with the Lewitsky

Dance Company for 20 years and is authorized to stage Lewitsky's choreography. Lewitsky (1916-2004) is considered a 20th century modern dance pioneer and doyenne of West Coast modern dance.

Lewitsky had several residencies in Eugene, including the UO and Edgewood Elementary School, as part of the NEA's Dancers in the Schools program. Bryn Hlava channeled Lewitsky's deceptively smooth movements in this homage to woman. Five string musicians and one soprano performed Larry Attaway's composition.

"Her song as pure as water filled with light cleanses the plain and rinses the mean air of the day in which men hate! From the throat of the woman who keeps on singing/ Day rises nobly/ Evaporating/ Toward the Stars."

Faculty member Shannon Mockli choreographed "What Once Was Held" to music by the Balanescu Quartet's "Empty Space Dance." Nine large lighted squares were projected onto the dance floor and each square contained one dancer sleeping, except one, who moved with elongated stretches and controlled poses.

Soon, one and another dancer stretched and posed in her space until all the dancers were dancing through and between the squares. Couples joined and parted and all ended as it had begun in this notable piece.

Kennedy's piece "Panopticon," with music by the Books, used isolated body movement, stylized walking and running, plus close group movement to lead our eyes to one or two or 10 as one on the stage. It was a noteworthy pure-movement piece.

The evening closed with Rita Honka's "Paul's Peace Piece" in three parts. First slow and controlled, followed by rapid, extravagant leaps and jumps, and, finally, controlled again. The male duet with phenomenal Byant

Henderson and fine Jimmie Banks was unique.

Gwen Curran of Eugene reviews dance for The Register-Guard.