

REVIEW: ReVision Dance Company presents *Propelling Voice* at Dance Place

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by Kacie Peterson

ReVision Dance Company took to the Dance Place stage April 1st and 2nd to perform *Propelling Voice* in a display of risk-taking, community, and diversity under the direction of Artistic Director, Shannon Quinn.

The curtain opened to a deep blue light which set the tone for the rest of the evening. Five unattended white dodecahedrons, which are 12 sided, three-dimensional objects, stood scattered across the floor. They ranged in size – from the size of a square foot to the size of a tall man. We were told there would be no intermission. Then, the theater went black, though the familiar scuttle of dancers' feet finding their way through the darkness was missing. A single spotlight shone down the center aisle of the house. A voice spoke up from somewhere close by. The dancers weren't on stage, they were behind us.

A single-file line of six ReVision company members, along with thirteen community dancers, made their way down to the stage, providing descriptions of the communities they associate with, all while passing the smallest dodecahedron to the person behind them. Once everyone poured out onto the stage, a simple line was spoken and served as a preview for the rest of the work: "We still have many questions..."

The community dancers were diverse, varying most noticeably in race and age. Everyone on stage wore a simple bright color paired with black. The range of individuals represented reassured me that the questions we have about ourselves, our communities, and our roles in those communities are normal at any stage of life, and across all people.

As the community dancers cleared, each of the six company members soloed with their own dodecahedron in a pool of circular light. I realized the apparent solos were actually duets between the moving dancer and her immobile dodecahedron. Each dancer formed a unique relationship with their prop, the varying sizes played a large role in determining the type of movement. The dancers got familiar with every inch of their 12-sided structure. The solos were dramatically different, as one dancer chose to balance in a headstand during hers, while another used her dodecahedron (the largest one which was taller than her) for support during her leg extensions. What was similar in the solos was the dancers' relation with the boundaries set by the pools of light. As an audience member, I expected the dancers to stay within their circle of light. However, more than one dancer toyed with the idea of dancing in the shadows. Perhaps it was a consequence of dancing with grand momentum or the choreographer's intent, but either way it worked well within the context of the work.

ReVision's choreography is largely Quinn's work with contributions from her dancers. The movement is daring, inventive, and strong. The dancers movement was seemingly effortless, which is a testimony to both Quinn's choreography as much as it is to her dancers' execution. Quinn involves quick-paced levels, weight, and directional changes frequently. With a stage of scattered dodecahedrons, the large space became tighter. The company dancers were clearly well rehearsed, and their running and movement pathways planned strategically. The dodecahedrons were never a visual distraction from the movement, and I was never concerned a dancer might collide with one. The music (simply credited as Biosphere, Loscil, Melanie Martinez, and Tycho in the program) was also harmonious with the movement. The music was light and melodious, but with a steady rhythm

across all of the segments. As a soundtrack, it kept time with the dancers, encouraging and motivating them to keep going throughout the piece.

The community dancers reconvened back on stage as the company filtered off. Quinn frequently interjected her choreography with interludes of text provided by the community dancers – which offered a quick, but welcome, pause from the steady-paced movement sequences. This is where the message of *Propelling Voice* was truly found.

“How do I define me?”

“Do I feel safe in my community?”

“If my biological family does not accept me, who do I choose to be my family?”

The questions hung heavy in the air, and I didn’t know how to answer them for myself just yet. I wrote them down to ponder later. Quinn interlaced the questions with movement in such a way that the two elements were perfectly balanced. As the text (written by Ben Levine and Alison Talvacchio) had the audience thinking deep, the choreography had us thoroughly engaged.

The transitions between the two groups of dancers was seamless, as were the transitions in the choreography. Quinn seems to be a huge fan of partnering, frequently incorporating different coupling combinations throughout the piece. Her dancers proved highly capable of fluidly sharing weight during contact partnering that moved over and around the dodecahedrons. It wasn’t only the physical connections that were impactful during the performance, but the visual connections as well. Every performer on the stage was aware of their surroundings, and of their fellow dancers. Even from my seat, I witnessed the eye-contact exchanges.

Suddenly, the timing of the piece changed. The dancers broke free of the partnering and fell into a canon. Upon doing this, Quinn successfully created a visual suspension of time. As her dancers, all posed on separate dodecahedrons, moved with different timings and weight, she projected the feeling of time lasting longer. I was mesmerized by dancer Elizabeth Zinni, who moved slower than the rest of the pack. I matched my breath with her deliberate movement, and suddenly, I was no longer racing. I was present.

Throughout the piece, the dancers served as their own stage crew without the shield of darkness. Quinn’s choreography served two purposes: it was both a delight and a distraction. As the dodecahedrons (which I can only hope are both durable and light, for the sake of the dancers moving these massive props) migrated through formation changes, Quinn kept our attention with duets and trios of dynamic movement. It was almost as if the props have rolled themselves into place (think those talking rock characters in Disney’s *Frozen*) when I realized my focus had been drawn to the movement downstage left. During one particular set migration, dancers Jillian Peterson and Olivia Landrum partnered beautifully, creating a duet that mirrored on opposite sides of a smaller dodecahedron. They were equally matched in time, space, and strength.

The dodecahedrons were then set as a group with every dancer was onstage with them. While there were more questions, this time the community dancers served more of a purpose than just a vocal interlude between racing sequences of choreography. They had become movers in the space, walking more than just their paths on and off the stage. A community of dancers had formed on stage. We reached a poignant moment -the performers lined up and reached out to grab the hand of a person standing next to them. It was a beautiful image of humanity, which I took to symbolize our need to connect with those around us.

The community dancers dispersed. The dodecahedrons then found their way to a straight line across the floor, with a company member standing far behind each one, along the back wall of the stage.

While the group of six ran headstrong at the dodecahedrons in front of them, only one at a time made it over their prop, before circling around the entire group and back to their original spot. If you imagine the dodecahedrons set out like a line-up of the planets, each dancer completed the path of a full revolution.

The set then migrated yet again. This time the pieces were stacked. Dancer Nkosinathi “Natty” Mncube bravely climbed the stack of three dodecahedrons, which resembled a snowman. The back of my neck prickled as I imagined what his view looked like. I don’t think I watched him get down for that particular reason. Or maybe it was the mini-dodecahedrons that fell from the rafters into the waiting arms of the dancers below that distracted me? The falling props were consistent in shape with those used on the ground, though they were much lighter and could be seen through.

Mncube made it down from his post atop the dodecahedron snowman, and the base rolled to center stage. As I stated earlier, Quinn has a knack for partnering equality. She paired Mncube with fellow dancer Matina Phillips, and the duo were matched in strength and athleticism. I held my breath as they raced up opposite sides of the dodecahedron and then clasped hands as they both reached the landing. It was no small feat. Once again, the connection between dancers played an integral role. The two shared the small space, neither wavering, as they both leaned into their own backspaces while holding the other around the waist for assurance.

“How do I know when to speak out?”

“How is my voice heard?”

Again, questions I need to find time to answer for myself. The community dancers returned. But they were more than just voices now. They were integrated into the choreography.

“If I take chances, will someone be there to catch me?”

Quinn’s answer was yes.

Her company and community dancers are either not afraid of heights or trust their fellow dancers completely. I assume it’s a mixture of both. This was clear as they took turns falling backward or leaping forward off the props and into the awaiting arms of their catchers. Either way, the back of my neck tingled and my stomach flopped as these dancers took risks I can’t fathom.

We watched as little children took big dives, as adults ran up the dodecahedrons like a staircase, and as dancers ricocheted their bodies off the big white, geometric props. Then came my most favorite jump of them all: Zinni flew up the staircase of dodecahedrons. Throwing her weight off the edge of the tallest prop, she soared for what seemed longer than an inhale. The lights go out as she’s safely caught below.

Quinn set up the piece so that the dodecahedrons could be interpreted in multiple ways. Perhaps Quinn meant the cubes to represent the questions we have about ourselves in our communities – each one larger than the one before it. The dodecahedrons grew in size but maintained the same amount of sides, insisting that though each question grows in importance, the smaller questions are still as complex as the others.

Perhaps Quinn meant these props to represent our communities themselves with their varying sizes representing the sizes of our communities, ranging from the smallest and our most immediate human connections to communities on a larger scale: our neighborhoods or those we distantly relate ourselves to.

But the dodecahedrons could also be direct representations of ourselves as we journey from our smallest to our largest, vibrant versions of ourselves, regardless of when we feel we've reached our peak. The 12 sides could be reflective of the multi-faceted selves we have within our own personalities and the audiences we expose them to through our own relationships. Prior to the show beginning, I had heard the audience from Saturday night's performance left feeling inspired and joyful. Now I know why.

Watching Quinn's choreography and her dancers (both company and community) is like settling in with a favorite book from your childhood. You have an idea of what to expect in the story, an evening of dance in this case. But as you read, there are details you didn't notice before, surprises along the way. There are moments that make you feel joy and moments that make you question. There are passages of action that you speed through and passages of complexity that you savor. But in the end, you remember why you loved the story.

Propelling Voice was all of that. It was the speeding, the savoring, the joy and the questioning. It's a story that I need to read and see again soon. And maybe if you're lucky, I'll lend you my copy.