

LOOKING LEFT - MOTION AT THE MILL'S PREMIERE SHOW  
SANTA CRUZ DANCE BLOG

by Julia Chiapella • November 2, 2011



Looking Left - Motion at the Mill's Premiere Show

October 21-23

Though it's been over a week since Motion at the Mill mounted its inaugural performance, the after-effects continue to ripple.

Billed as a "low-tech festival of dance and performance," *Looking Left* was performed at Motion Pacific's brilliant new dance studio Oct. 21-23 at Motion at the Mill on Front Street and was exactly that: simple props, simple costumes, simple lighting and sound.

But if low-tech should in any way convey the notion that the concepts behind the dance were low-tech, that notion needs to immediately be dispelled.

Dance in Santa Cruz has been taken to another level.

Thanks to Cid Perlman, the Fulbright scholar who, along with Cabrillo's David King, has taken up residence in Santa Cruz, *Looking Left* drew from the work of dancers working in the Los Angeles and San Francisco area to bring an evening of thought-provoking, ethereal, and sometimes enigmatic dance to Santa Cruz.

Beginning with Rebecca Alson-Milkman and Carol McDowell's "Surveillance Solo No. 1", the stage was set for an evening unlike others. Alson-Milkman sat behind a desk and read from government-issued reports while McDowell, dressed in black and white polka dots, furiously danced her regrets and dreams as laid out by a series of detailed accounts of her personal life presented as surveillance documents. Alson-Milkman's bureaucratic monotone provided a great foil for McDowell's frenzied movements though I would have liked to see some movement from her, however small, that echoed her status as McDowell's superego.

Meg Wolfe performed the only other solo of the evening with her "Are You Picking Up What I'm Putting Down?"—a piece that was both languid and puzzling. Constantly shifting her center of gravity, suspending movement, and with a gaze that appeared inner-focused and unaware of her audience, the long piece was a direct challenge to the audience, as its title indicated. By its end, a space had been cleared where more questions settled in its wake.



Photo by Beau Saunders

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The evenings two duets, "Shofar" and "Forecast: All The Time in the World," were equally ethereal and mesmerizing. Danced by Danied Bear Davis and Kristen Greco, "Shofar" served as meditation to both the languid and buoyant moments in a relationship as well as the gut-wrenching havoc generated by them. What happens when we walk side by side with another? "Forecast: All the Time in the World," featuring Damara Vita Ganley and

Melicio Estrella of Joe Goode Performance Group, brooded deliciously on the possibilities. All four dancers in these pieces brought a sense of rigor and commitment to their dance. Watching them was pure delight.

Rounding out the evening were the group pieces: "Gnome" choreographed by Dixie FunLee Shulman, Cid Perlman's "Drowning Poems," and "Yes Is Not Passive," choreographed and directed by Stephanie Nugent. Shulman relocated to Santa Cruz two years ago from New York and brings a sense of comic outrage to her pieces. "Gnome," made use of dancers from Motion at the Mill's resident dance company, Flex, who used the words of Noam Chomsky to pit their movement against. Nugent used a square of light on the stage as a focal point for her dancers, one of whom chanted the word "yes" at points throughout the piece. Both pieces were well danced and loaded with implications, both simple and complex. But it was Perlman's "Drowning Poems" that trembled with a poignancy and grief so textually rich it took my breath away. With startling motifs that put the performers in a watery underworld, Daniel Bear Davis, Damara Vita Ganley, and Molly Katzman danced the piece with a solemn passion that was mesmerizing.

*Looking Left* should be reprised. It was that good. But with Motion at the Mill's riveting new space and dedication to bringing quality dance performance and education to Santa Cruz, there'll be plenty more where that came from.