

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



photo: Alan DiBerio

For Members Only: Enter My World

by Kariamuwelsh

For Members Only is the shared title for two dances, one by Ellie Goudie-Averill and the other by Lesya Popil. Both choreographers used the sculpture of Nicole Donnelley in their works.

The *For Members Only* choreographed by Lesya Popil with music by Johann Johannes is divided into three sections: “The Dark Socket”, “Ashes and Roses” and “Ascent and Landing.” Loss and longing run as currents throughout this mournful work.

The dancers emerge with their faces, arms, and legs covered in white powder. Two triangular steel sculptures stand on the floor. White plastic mannequin parts are strewn around like motionless dancers. As they are repositioned, they reminded me that we are the sum of our parts.

Hedy Wyland walks across the stage holding plastic hands in her hands. She places them on the floor, then moves away. Lindsay Browning moves with anchorless arms in each hand as if she is a stilt walker making stalking movements. Ellie Goudie-Averill enters with a dismembered torso held like a trophy above her head. There is an examination of body parts, first the feet, then the legs gunning, revving, but going nowhere. Wyland puts her arms in the open thighs of a dismembered torso. Popil softly recites a rhythmic poem.

The dancers move as spirits, not in unison but as separate parts of a whole, with the sculptural cages finally becoming receptacles for both the dancers and the body parts. The solemnity never lifts; the three dancers seem to ever so gently lift the metaphorical veil of gloom just enough so that we, the audience, can become part of the grieving quality of the work. It taps into a place that most all of us have known at least once in our lives.

For Members Only, choreographed by Ellie Goudie-Averill is more embodied and sensory as the dancers move, fall and slide over each other. The three dancers have what looks like wings applied to the outsides of their right eyes. They roll off of each other and establish their own spaces, initiating series of sharp, urgent movements to Techno music by mogwai.

Something curious happens: A dancer goes to the rear of the stage near the taller sculpture and she takes off of her top. The audience takes a breath...But no, she puts her top back on. What is happening? She dances for a while and then goes to the back again, takes off her top, and hangs it over the sculpture as if it were a screen. We see her smooth glistening back and wait. She retrieves the top and puts it on again. Is this a tease? I don't know, but it certainly gets our attention and all thoughts of predictability go out the window.

This *For Members Only* is sculptural and abstract. The music becomes more intense but Goudie-Averill resists matching that intensity in the dancing. Instead, the performers slowly withdraw with Goudie-Averill left slowly climbing into the sculpture as the lights dim.

These two works suggest a world one can enter and exit based on need. The body parts and sculptures are key players in both works, implying a view of ourselves and others as fragmented.

Popil's study on grief and longing is an eloquent portrayal of someone who has lost a loved one. Goudie-Averill connects to the sculptural objects around her, making a poignant commentary on the plastic objects that serve as replicas of our parts.

For Members Only in both of its manifestations might be seen as a world where membership is by invitation only and that invitation, whether sought after or not, will surely one day be extended to all of us.

For Members Only, Ellie Goudie-Averill and Lesya Popil, Sept. 22-23, Mascher Space Co-op.

By Kariamua Welsh (1949-2021)

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