

REVIEW

Wellspring fall concert has a lot to ‘Offer’

By Mark Wedel

Kalamazoo Gazette, Sunday, November 18, 2007

“Sweet Air” and incredibly complex movement saturate this year’s Wellspring Fall Concert of Dance.

Founder and choreographer Cori Terry spoke to the audience Friday night at the Wellspring Theater before her premiere for the concert, “Counter Offer.”

Composer and Grand Valley State University professor Bill Ryan had challenged her to create a piece set to David Lang’s “Sweet Air.” The music is a strong “stream of notes,” she said, “complex but whimsical.” The effect on the ears is like “standing under a waterfall.” She had to come up with a “movement vocabulary” that matched multiple rhythms in kaleidoscopic sound.

Her resulting “Counter Offer,” with dancers Jennifer Hudson, Michael Miller, Rachel Miller, Francesca Pileci-Bates and Paula Rinaldo, was abstract art in movement. The dancers, in costumes by Patricia Plasko of red, white, black and yellow block of color, move in perfect timing. Their grace is a result of precision, like a flock of swallows imitating a timepiece mechanism. (Wellspring will perform the piece with Ryan’s New Music Ensemble at GVSU on Nov. 29.)

Terry repeated to the audience Friday night her mantra, that modern dance is to be enjoyed for its visual aesthetic. Beauty and abstraction in movement doesn’t necessarily have to have a story, meaning or message.

The first three pieces, Michael Miller’s “Rapid Assembly” and Terry’s “Sense of Self” and “Rippledeffect,” are pure movement set to compositions by Ryan, Richard Adams and Steve Reich. They are from the Wellspring spring concert with Opus 21, more precision and grace moving to more modern post-minimalist kaleidoscopic torrents of notes.

The other fall premiere, Michael Miller’s “Not Like Trees,” and Terry’s spring concert piece, “Half a World Away,” are a bit different in music, and their content moves toward implied meaning instead of abstractions.

REVIEW

Wellspring's fall concert has a lot to "Offer," cont.

"World," noted in the program, is inspired by a New York Times column by David Brooks on the cultural and political divisions in the world. Three dancers in blue and two in orange are divided by a wall of blocks and move to abrasive electronic music by Aphex Twin. A blue dancer is lifted over the wall, and the music becomes more melodic. The wall is dismantled into pillars, on which each dancer moves as an individual.

"Trees" is comical enough to trigger laughs in the audience. Rachel Miller, Pileci-Bates and Terry come out in large gray tutus. They mince and prance about, occasionally pulling up their skirts to hide their faces and collapsing to twitch legs in little seizures. It seems a parody of feminine stress from too much ballet practice and fits the music - the unusual singing of Iceland's Bjork - perfectly.

The large audience cheered "Trees" and gave rousing applause to the rest of the concert.

Wellspring's Fall Concert of Dance has its final performance today at 2 p.m. in the Epic Center in downtown Kalamazoo.