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Theatre Dance Performance Art Music
Alternative and International Theatre

SOAKING WET

David Parker & Jeffrey Kazin present

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works by Karen Bernard, Marsi Burns & Alice Tierstein, Rachel Cohen and Deirdre Towers

September 24-27, 2015

West End Theater, 263 West 86th Street, NYC

Reviewed by Barney Yates September 27, 2015

Soaking WET presented a program September 24 to 27, 2015 at West End Theater that was conceptually ingenious and therefore, exciting. Works by Karen Bernard, the team of Marsi Burns and Alice Tierstein, Rachel Cohen and Deirdre Towers were staged. Soaking WET is in residence at the West End, where it presents various collections of works. The last one I attended was in May and was also engagingly conceptual, although spotty in its successes. This concert was spot-on throughout.



Stephanie Beck's sculpted towers

In "New Developments" by Rachel Cohen, Stephanie Beck's sculpted cardboard (or was it papier-mâché?) towers leaned and swayed; a pile of paper cubes moved and seethed because a man is on his back under them. What's afoot was sort of whimsical urban renewal, with narrow buildings levitating and three people handing off their structures, catching them before they fell. A big building raised a new building on a crane. Gray buildings in a black surround made a very pretty stage picture. The dancers, manipulating all this real estate, were in black. It's funny that the choreographer of a different dance on the program was named Deirdre Towers. Her name would have fit in perfectly here.

Karen Bernard's "reperformance: 1963-1996, It Could Have Been Different" started out with video projections of the original versions of the works presented, harkening back to their years of origin, beginning with 1993.

In "Footsteps on the...", an excerpt from a 1993 dance, we witnessed Stacy Lynn Smith moving in Bauhaus shapes to Afro Disco music, then moving into fluid movement. Stark shadows appeared on either side, drawing attention to her big afro hairdo. The soundtrack (Brooks Williams'



Lisa Parra in "It Could Have Been Different." Photo by Tim Fujioka.

deconstruction of "Teardrops" by Womack and Womack) sampled and repeated. Starkly, Smith rocked herself in floor poses, then accelerated into quick movements. In "Work" (1994), Donna Costello, clad in blue shirt and apron, moved in prancing steps, then dropped, moving throughout like an unsteady marionette. Music by Wendy Mae Chambers was trumpet and xylophone. In "Strange Dear" (an excerpt from 1995), Cole Porter's "So in Love With You am I" from "Kiss Me Kate" played behind Merisiha Mesihovic as she took stage in a bathtub and then dressed herself. Clad in black velvet trimmed in white,

she engaged in floor work on her back, grasped her erogenous zones, then threw currency into the air. In "It Could Have Been Different," harkening from 1996, short-haired Lisa Parra appeared in a striped costume, black and white with wide stripes, again Bauhaus influenced, and thereby Bauhaus was juxtaposed with Disco. A version of "West Side Story" was played ("Stick to Your Own Kind"). Ryan Migge, in a red cape, entered and circled the stage, singing the same song in Spanish with a lovely voice. He draped her in his red cape. She escaped the cape and made circles with it.

A confession: imagining the early 1990s as far away is a disturbing notion to me. I am still getting used to the loss of complete certainty I had in the early eighties, when I felt I knew everything, or at least everything I needed to know. In the early nineties, when the world got digital, my world seemed to fly apart and it didn't knit itself back after that. These dances, with their comment on the recent past (as seen in the Disco references and others) represented an aesthetic that was current just before the digital age. So they feel both current and past-tense, familiar and passe at the same time, and that uneasiness may just be what I was supposed to savor in the program. The curtain call, showing us the choreographer and all the dancers, helped us pull this "then and now" feeling together in our minds, coalescing our temporal perspective on the works.

In "Cross Currents" by Deirdre Towers, a standup bass and guitar took stage and Olsi Gjerci danced in Spanish style to Spanish guitar music. But his movements were more balletic than Spanish. Enter Elisabet Torras Aguilera, costumed in red. The music became a mix of Spanish and what sounded sort of modern pop or even country. (It included a number named "Driftin' Blues.") Aguilera was on and off quickly; when she danced before us, her percussive sounds--claps and stomps--fit the music nicely. Her back bends were impressive. There were no castanets; most of the rhythm was done with her feet. From the singer's voice (Paul Jared Newman), we got *Voce Americano*. From his guitar, we were getting *Guitar Espanol!* No wonder, I wrote in my notes, that the title was "Cross Currents." I love to see the art of Flamenco absorbing cross-cultural elements, stretching and growing. Too often inventive dancers get resistance when they mix Flamenco with other elements. Shame on their detractors when that happens.

"Comin' Or Goin'" with senior dancers Marsi Burns and Alice Tierstein was a Vladimir-and-Estragon piece without the bullying. The pair were clad in polka dots and porkpie hats. One fell repeatedly. The dialogue--"What did I?" and "Why?"--was a series of unanswered questions. Billed as a piece for two seasoned, mature dancers, we were pointed to the differences between seeing life in hindsight or in the moment. That's the human condition, isn't it? But older people are more aware of it. For Burns and Tierstein, as older dancers, it was a letter to the world, and a profound one, to cap an evening that was mostly about perspective in one way or another. [B.Y.]



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