

Review

## Dancers show off athleticism, raw feeling

Varone company kicks off Heinz Poll festival

Published on Sunday, Jun 27, 2010

Contemporary dance company Doug Varone and Dancers kicked off Akron's Heinz Poll Summer Dance Festival with eye-popping athleticism and rich emotional resonance with three pieces this weekend, including a three-segment sneak peek at Varone's current work in progress.

The company began working on the evolving *Chapters From a Broken Novel* a year ago and continued to develop the piece during an intense three-week summer session that drew 60 students from around the world to the University of Akron. UA is a co-commissioner of the new *Chapters*, which was previewed Friday and Saturday at Firestone Park and will make its world premiere in October in Fairfield, Conn.

Choreographer Varone, who formed his New York-based company in 1986, is an award-winning dance maker who has created works for opera, theater, film and the couture fashion runway. His dancers are known for their stunning agility and individualism.

Varone has a knack for delving into the human condition with an electric honesty. This weekend, his dances elicited emotions ranging from sheer joy to brutal struggle.

Varone created *Chapters* as 22 dances whose order can be changed or performed in smaller sequences. This weekend, the company performed the first three duets of the 80-minute work. The dances were inspired by quotes Varone has gathered in remarks from a range of people, from famous authors to crazy people in the New York subway.

Each chapter, which delves into complex human emotions, is set to an original score by David Van Tieghem. They began with the duet *Playing in the Shadows*, with Julia Burrer and Alex Springer, a continuous give and take that resembles a grabbing form of tag.

The raw emotion in *Glass* is enthralling to watch, as a dysfunctional couple grapples with and repels one another repeatedly. One gets the feeling that their painful relationship is irreparable, like broken glass.

Ryan Corrison and the fiery Netta Yerushalmy create a mood of great tension and suffering in this abusive relationship. Even when they are spooning on the floor, she grasps past him with outstretched fingers.

There's rarely a moment of relief in this struggle, as she's on her stomach struggling to escape his arms as he's on his knees. Even as she dives for his embrace, he grabs her hands in a way that repels their closeness.

In *Chapters'* abstract final dance, *Egalite*, Burrer and Natalie Desch portray women reaching a level of emotional intimacy with one another, but they're disconnected at the end. They kneel facing each other

but don't make eye contact, as each creates swirling motions with her arms around her head, busy in her own world.

Varone, a computer tennis player who is internationally ranked, found his inspiration for the dance in a quote by Victorian author Elizabeth Bowen, paraphrased to say, "Intimacies between women begin in revelations and end in small talk."

The 2006 *Lux*, which the company performed in Akron two years ago, delights in the deliciousness of movement itself. This fluid dance begins and ends in strikingly beautiful manner with solos by Eddie Taketa, who starts out in a joyful exploration of solitary dance and ends gesturing up to the heavens in an unforgettable image.

*Lux* is in a constant state of flux with its movement, partnering and groupings. The dancers' movements are so sweeping and expansive, it often feels like there are many more than eight of them onstage.

An especially lush part of the weekend program was the 2004 *Castles*, set to six explosive waltzes by Prokofiev. Standing out was the humorous male duet between John Beasant and Springer, which features many chest bumps and butt slapping that ends up skirting desire.

The men briefly hold hands and walk toward the audience, only to drop hands and go their separate ways. The smallest movements are telling, as each man mimes adjusting his tie in the mirror at the end of the encounter.

Also enticing in *Castles* was the antiromance in a duet between Desch and Taketa as a couple trying to connect. They display an awkward tenderness as she works hard for his attention, rolling the unresponsive Taketa over on the floor and even crawling under his knee.

They begin a seemingly romantic lift but then he "drops" her. They finally begin to get it together as they scooch in unison on their bellies.

Varone makes seemingly pedestrian movement look serenely beautiful as Desch finally lies on Taketa's back as he's in a pushup position, lowering his body.

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