



Doug Varone Gives *Chapters From a Broken Novel* Its New York Premiere: More work from veteran choreographers, male edition

BY DEBORAH JOWITT / MARCH 23, 2011

Doug Varone's company is stocked with seven wonderfully individual dancers, and the choreographer cherishes that, but he presents them as a tribe. However different from one another they may look, they also seem bred in his particular style and the messages it conveys. Most of the time, they move with luxurious amplitude and free flow; rarely does a movement look stopped, unless they collapse onto the floor. They travel with slightly bent knees, the better to rebound into motion. Their encounters are messy, ephemeral; they slip past, glance off one another, connect in poignantly raw and clumsy ways. They hide their perfection as dancers in order to convey humanity.

Varone's latest work, *Chapters From a Broken Novel*, seen in its New York premiere during the company Joyce season, represents a new approach. The group has had a residency at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA since 2006, and over the course of putting together the 74-minute piece in 2009-2010, he had six open-to-the-public working sessions at the Y. The techniques he employed in collaboration with the dancers suit the fragmentary nature of *Chapters*. Its 20 parts, some of them very short, were influenced by quotes from books and movies, as well as from snippets of overheard conversations. The program lists the titles of the sections, but I wish Varone had included the quotes that inspired them, the way choreographers working to songs sometimes provide the lyrics.

The titles are also projected onto the looped white fabric that provides a moveable ceiling for *Chapters* (set design by Andrew Lieberman), and while some of them need no explanation, however enigmatic, quotes might help certain dance passages that are more oblique in intent. I find myself remembering best the passages that were the most powerfully expressive, such as "Glass," one of two duets for Netta Yerushalmy and Ryan Corrison, in which extreme tenderness crackles with an anger that's intensified by a tremendous, calamitous electronic percussion score by David Van Tieghem (augmented in performance by the composer on an array of instruments and devices).

I'd like to be able to grasp "The Ghosts of Insects" in the way that I do the wrenching "Erased by Degrees," in which the performers, one by one, dance at Erin Owen. Each short passage affects her like a blow, and eventually the blows are real. Eddie Taketa digs into her belly as if eviscerating her; Natalie Desch slaps her. Shaking and jerking, Owen is alone. It's not that you want everything to be this clear. You may not know what Yerushalmy is reliving in "Twelve Dreams for Rent," but her terrific performance, like a trailer for a movie, flashes 12 powerful, very diverse experiences in a very few minutes.

Jane Cox's lighting sets many scenes and complements the atmosphere of fragmentation and unfinished business and alters the look of Liz Prince's gray and blue palette for the costumes. Cox lays windows of light on the floor, then makes them disappear. One corner of the stage may briefly take on a new color. Follow spots seek to capture Alex Springer as he dances his solo, "Target." Taketa, alone and still or slowly marching in "Funeral," is bathed in bluish light.

Chapters as a whole is a rich, ragged piece seething with the kinds of forces that confound us. By the time Julia Burrer enters quietly to end the performance with "The Final Proverb," you feel as if you've lived through something as intense, as flawed, as messy, as gripping, as touched with beauty, and as worthy of love as any old day. If you're among the lucky.

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