

Doug Varone and Dancers head straight for poetry

By Ann Murphy, Correspondent

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Doug Varone knows his way around a circle.

The New York-based choreographer, whose company Doug Varone and Dancers performed at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts for a woefully brief run last weekend, also knows the possibilities inherent in triangles, squares and straight lines.

He uses geometric form to do the heavy lifting in his finely crafted work, then releases his dancers into the music with [sensuous abandon](#). It is an [irresistible](#) formula: formal design channeling animal impulse resulting in molten patterns riding, plunging and pressing on.

[As a master of his craft, Varone has enormous facility creating discernable images of community, angst, hope and death without ever resorting to blow-by-blow storytelling. In Sunday's performance, each of the three works bypassed direct narrative altogether, even in his most drama-laden "Home," and headed straight for poetry.](#)

Not every Varone dance nailed its subject.

The opening piece, "Lux," set to Philip Glass' "The Light," began and ended with sprightly, limpid dancing by Eddie Taketa, a company member since 1994. Circling around the stage and conjuring with circling arms at both the dance's opening and close, the dark-haired Taketa embodied a kind of magus figure invoking a midsummer mania like a Shakespearean wizard.

Bit by bit the company appeared and then cavorted in mercurial designs. All the while a rising full moon crept toward its zenith. But too many hypercharged actions, arms forever flying, entrances and exits a well-limned whir bogged "Lux" down. It never attained the metaphoric clarity it promised, even if it did show off each of the diverse dancers beautifully.

[The duet "Home," the gothic heart of the afternoon danced by Varone himself with the haunting Natalie Desch, had a Pinteresque grasp of the perfectly framed and potently toned gesture all too rare in a dance world that has forgotten the power of poetic gesticulation.](#)

"Home" is danced by a couple whose relationship is in the final and inexorable throes of death and Varone gives heartbreak the face of wordless fate. Through brilliant economy, he creates movements that speak volumes while the dancers' implacable masks attempt to hide or contravene the commotion they feel.

[Varone's "Boats Leaving," the concert's last piece, was the quiet masterwork. It was as quiet and sure-footed and profound as "Lux" was lightweight.](#)

Set to Arvo Part's "Te Deum" it combined the flow of "Lux" with the dramatic heft of "Home" to depict a Styxian realm with a series of suspended, painterly poses echoing the work of Hieronymous Bosch and Goya. The dancers struggled to rise, labored to support one another, ached to progress together, to be boat, mast, water and wind, and then to leave that realm, pair after pair of dancers standing sentinel, witnessing a passage, then also leaving.

The company danced in Jane Cox's stunning light, its palette of gold, violet, white and honey slinking in, shining down, darting sideways, spectral, haunted and sublime.

[Varone and company deserve to be invited back to San Francisco soon, and next time let's hope their residency will last longer than a heartbeat.](#)