

Doug Varone and Dancers

by Becca Hirschman

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Doug Varone and Dancers, a fixture in the New York City dance scene and modern dance departments at various New England colleges for years, graced San Francisco with its presence this past weekend. The company, plus Mr. Varone himself, skipped across the stage and back into our hearts, reminding us that dance is an everlasting feeling, even when sitting upright in a well padded chair.

The evening opened with Varone's shining "Lux," a visual kaleidoscope of Philip Glass's minimalist "The Light." The ever-introspective Eddie Taketa opened the work with soft jumps and a thoughtful look upon his face while a round, yellow moon began to rise in the background. The seven other dancers, dressed in Liz Prince's elegant black separates, sprung out of the wings to join Taketa in this intelligent yet deceptively simple-looking romp. They circled about in pairs, trios, and groups, continuously growing and retreating with the pulsing music until everyone burst into a glowing lit of bodies against the darkness behind.

"Home," a dance theater duet with Natalie Desch and Varone, swayed the mood from lighthearted to downright serious and depressing. "Home" may be where the heart is, but Desch and Varone investigated some ups and mostly downs of life at home: the angst, love, passion, hate, and need. Both of the performers put their best into this performance, and their powerful presence grew as they shifted their wooden chairs from one spot to another quickly. Clack, Clack. Bang, Bang. Boom, Boom. But the mood had shifted so far from the tenderness and beauty of "Lux" that I felt it hard to become totally immersed in "Home."

"Boats Leaving," though, mixed the best of both worlds into one picturesque movement score. Accompanied by Arvo Pärt's "Te Deum," a choral work with voices beautifully rising and falling, the eight dancers formed into snapshots and then elaborated on them, expressing emotions and feelings as they fluttered about or wiggled on the floor face down. Bathed in Jane Cox's golden and then cooler side lighting, the dancers pushed forward, supporting each other as they danced in isolation or together. Taketa and Desch led the way, whether leading the group in a sharp diagonal or gesturing with an arm or head, and Netta Yerushalmy danced with a quiet intensity.

Each of Varone's dancers displayed impressive qualities, which is a telling sign. He understands how to direct and showcase a remarkable complement of abilities within his own well-structured and developed movement, and he tells a good story through airy gestures and musical choreography to boot. Varone and his troupe aren't scheduled to return to San Francisco anytime soon, but let's hope they do.