

Dance Out of Darkness

Doug Varone's newest work draws on music and tragedy.

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Tragic world events can inspire artistic creation, a fact which Doug Varone's newest work, *Alchemy*, reflects. At the heart of this piece for eight dancers is the abduction and murder of the Jewish-American journalist Daniel Pearl by Islamist extremists in 2002.

Alchemy is inspired by Steve Reich's *Daniel Variations*, a score co-commissioned by the Daniel Pearl Foundation and influenced by both Pearl's story and the biblical Book of Daniel. Varone was immediately drawn to the score when he first heard it at its Carnegie Hall premiere two years ago. With *Alchemy* he says he strives to "be true to the score's emotional texture without creating a narrative in any way," using, for example, imagery drawn from the writings in the Book of Daniel.

And Varone shares this inspiration with his dancers. Ryan Corrison, a company member, says it's "a more intense emotional piece than some of his other work. The knowledge of the source material informs my emotions and the quality of the movement."

The poignancy of the influences was vivid in the choreography as it was developing in June at the Doug Varone and Dancers workshop held at SUNY Brockport. Set to music that often reflects its inspiration quite directly (take the second movement of the score with its repetition of Pearl's videotaped words, "My name is Daniel Pearl"), the choreography integrates a sense of falling into the urgency of the movement. Dancers shift in and out of unison, joining each other briefly before breaking off into new and separate choreographic thoughts. Oppositional forces tug from all directions as one dancer turns another's head or forces a knee to bend. Varone alternates between strong, big movement and gestural phrases, using groups of men and women as distinct entities throughout much of the piece. "Perhaps," Varone says, "in the back of my mind was the separation of Pearl and his wife and how emotionally wrenching that was for both of them in different ways."

In creating a dance tied to such specific concerns, Varone says he's working to be "as potent as possible with imagery but never too specific. I always want to leave room for imagination to spill past the stage into a viewer's mind and heart." He feels that "a larger work about humanity is evolving. I am interested in the exploration of relationships, human interaction and how this affects a community, and in offering an element of hope."

Varone believes in *Alchemy's* "potential to cross boundaries and open dialogues." The company will premiere the piece October 4 at the University of Akron, and plans to bring it to Pittsburgh in November and the Joyce in late February. "I hope as we tour the dance," says Varone, "that we can have discussions with political and religious groups about the reasons why cultures in our world remain so at odds."—*Elena Hecht*