

Varone's moves vary from a quiet touch to 'Alchemy'

Dance Review

By Jane Vranish, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

When we hear the word "dance," most of us envision some type of superhuman athletic endeavor, probably set to music. But dance can be much more than that -- a touch, a walk, a free-falling tumble -- when performed with the artistry of Doug Varone and Dancers at the Byham Theater on Saturday night.

Of course this ensemble had the technique to perform a work like "Lux," a piece danced by the light of a rising moon. Beginning with Eddie Taketa's casual solo, "Lux" gradually gained momentum with movements that emerged organically, spilling into one another until the movement seemed to be coursing through the dancers' veins.

But Varone's movement comes from the earth -- he can insert a stomp or heavy-footed runs, even some tap steps -- and he doesn't deny that. And it comes from a deep emotional center, like the sweet program opener, "Tomorrow," which began with a touch that unfolded into so much more.

Set to vintage songs by Reynaldo Hahn, there was a genteel flavor, although we heard the weight and felt the flow of the dance. At one point a man dropped backwards, only to be caught by a woman. He urgently jumped into her arms, only to be slowly wrapped in a tender hug.

Varone also showcased a similar moment in his choreography for Pittsburgh Opera's wonderful "The Grapes of Wrath," which wrapped up performances at The Benedum Center yesterday. The fact that he used this startling emotional embrace in slightly different ways did not diminish its effect, for each gesture held its own truth, a tribute to [a company that can use everyday motions in a virtuosic, yet honest way.](#)

Varone can also heighten those motions, as in "Alchemy," his latest work based on Steve Reich's mesmerizing score that juxtaposed readings on journalist Daniel Pearl and the Book of Daniel. Instead of his trademark fluidity, the movement was often angular and broken, but unbowed.

"Alchemy" was often relentless. Perhaps this was due to the global nature of the subject matter, the images that constantly flash on the television screen.

"Alchemy" invited a disconnect from the pain, despite a gesture of hope at the end. In the end, it proved to be a reminder that Pearl and other victims had no relief, along with the realization that we must remember.

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