

## Varone brings artful vision to presentation of modern dance

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By STEVE SUCATO  
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If any choreographer's work bears comparison to that of a painter or sculptor, it would be Doug Varone's.

In his classic work "Rise" (1993), which opened Doug Varone and Dancers' performance Friday night in the University at Buffalo's Center for the Arts, Varone's choreography was applied to the stage like bold brushstrokes to a canvas. Barefoot dancers glided about to composer John Adams' Fearful Symmetries in loose, free-flowing movement that marked the stage with fleeting hues and textures. Four pairs of dancers in varied solid-colored costumes sailed limberly through Varone's creation sagging, floating and drifting into brief encounters with one another before rolling, sidling or backing off the stage.

Exhilaration, drama and conflict spilled out in the dancers' performances as they lit into athletically aggressive choreography with sweeping limbs that left one's mouth and eyes gaping, only to further surprise with understated gestures that nuanced the work's intent. The unequivocal highlight of the evening, "Rise" appeared tailor-made for Varone's dancers, especially the pairing of Adriane Fang and Eddie Taketa, who performed it perfectly.

If "Rise" evoked a sense of a great brushwork painting, the program's second offering, "Deconstructing English" (2004), came off more like a surreal finger-painting.

Set to an experimental and dissonant original score by composer David Van Tieghem that was both inventive and grating, Varone's choreography for the work seemed to follow suit. With perhaps the intention of showing the deconstructed choreographic process, Varone's work instead set about early on deconstructing viewer interest, giving the work the appearance of a rehearsal session with six dancers slouching about, half finishing their movements.

A brick wall, dark storm clouds and video projections of the dancers dancing in slow motion captured more interest than the live dancers did for most of the tedious dance work, except toward its end, when the projected storm clouds appeared and the choreography sped up into movement that was more interesting, full, and polished.

For the final work on the program, "Castles" (2004), Varone's choreography was applied to the stage and his dancers more like a sculptor. Opening on a view of several vertical rows of pin-spots projected onto a darkened stage, the first of the work's six vignettes featured the company's full complement of eight dancers traversing the stage and gravitating into pairings and clusters that, along with the dancers' animated gestures and stances, suggested personal relationships between them.

Lyrical, buoyant, and graceful, Varone's sculpted choreography set to composer Sergei Prokofiev's Waltz Suite, Opus 110, created powerful images of the dancers cascading toward and away from one another. Of the work's five remaining vignettes, the most lasting impression was made by a duet featuring dancers John Beasant III and Daniel Chardon.

Working in a modern dance style that may be less familiar to general audiences, Doug Varone and Dancers (sans an injured Varone) were for much of the program artful in it, leaving the audience awash in Varone's masterful interpretation of the style's athletic prowess and fluid beauty.

### DANCE REVIEW

#### Doug Varone and Dancers

Friday night in the University at Buffalo's Center for the Arts, North Campus, Amherst.

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