

# Critical Dance

RaHir

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Location: **Varone and Company Rise to the Occasion**

San Doug Varone and Dancers

Francisco April 7, 2006 8PM

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

15 years in the making, and Doug Varone and Dancers have returned to San Francisco. I wasn't here the first time, as I was in middle school and probably off at a slumber party ordering pizza and talking about first kisses. But last night's performance inspired me to hopefully catch the company again before another 15 years goes by. Presented at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts by San Francisco Performances, the company of nine dancers (including Varone himself) swept in for the first night of a three-performance run featuring three West Coast premieres, all focusing somewhat steadily on relationships and couplings.

The big hit of the night proved to be Varone's "Castles." With Prokofiev's hauntingly eerie "Waltz Suite," eight dancers paired up and flew around the stage with each other in a powerful dance of match, mismatch, and rematch. I had fleeting memories of the ballroom scene in "Cinderella," processional and all, with each dancer searching for his or her special someone. The duet between Eddie Taketa and Natalie Desch proved particularly moving with emphasis on the pause, the thought, before each one advanced upon the other. And not only was their reflection and care evident with each place of a hand or the curve of the back, but Varone's choreography proved thoughtful in itself. There's no superfluous moves, no unnecessary gestures, no extra bold lighting cues. Instead, the dancers, the dance, and the costumes and set design - it all comes together into a statement of hope and continuation, fully seen at the end with a flurry dancing spotlighted by the warm and touching lighting design by Jane Cox and Joshua Epstein.

Varone's "Rise," choreographed in 1993 and commonly referred to as the company's signature work, opened the program. Set to John Adams' minimalist yet moving "Fearful Symmetries," the work spotlighted four distinct couples dressed in violet, purple, teal green, and red. Emphasizing freedom of movement and solid release technique, the dancers overlapped in a smart study on the flow of motion. From mile-high leaps to steady balances in arabesque and supported lifts overhead, these dancers didn't stop--even in a "resting state," there's plenty of emotion and dedication in their faces, presence, and line. Time doesn't pause, and neither does the dance, with the pace charging onward and upward with fierce determination.

"The Thing of the World" showed us that Varone isn't just about large group pieces that make you lean on the edge of your seat for 28 minutes. A duet for Varone and John Beasant III, "The Thing of the World" focused on what happens to a relationship when things go wrong. Stressing repetition in slightly different situations, we saw that not only do things not always happen according to plan, but that many times our emotions and actions get out of control, to the point of disastrous results. While including more gesturing and posturing than full on dance phrases and not as visually stimulating as "Rise" or "Castles," "The Thing of the World" is an interesting study in its own right.

Doug Varone and Dancers marries contemplative, intricate choreography with talented dancers in what might be one of the most successful modern dance performances I've seen for awhile. While New York City is lucky to be home to Doug Varone and Dancers San Francisco has received a gift with these three performances, and let's hope that they return again soon.

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