

Doug Varone review



"Boats Leaving"; photo courtesy of Tian, Qinzhen / ADF2006

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Doug Varone and Dancers in "Castles"/ Photo by Richard Termine

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The piece could easily be curated by a museum and viewed as clusters of moving images. The dancers are the people hidden in the hold one minute and the ship itself the next. In one sweep, they are prone, facing diagonally upstage right, becoming the still waters, lying in wait for the next violent wave. They repeat sequences as if trying to re-create the familiar. Throughout, we want to hold on with them and to them, help them, make them safe. Make us safe.



"Boats Leaving"; photo courtesy of Tian, Qinzhen / ADF2006

lose its mooring and slip into the banal or obvious. But Varone seems to have taken all that he has been involved with, including film, opera and photography, to create this deep, poetic, prescient work.

New research tells us that Americans feel lonelier than ever before. "Boats Leaving" could be the signature work of communities coming undone. We should heed the warning.

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By Linda Belans
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I swear I heard voices — people talking, muttering, worrying, crying, shouting, laughing, bantering, flirting, arguing and doing the dozens of other sounds we hear and make during the course of our lives.

None of Doug Varone's dancers, on stage Thursday at the American Dance Festival, said anything aloud, save an occasional, intentional grunt. Yet there are so many conversations going in all the movement material packed into a phrase — surely there were voices.

In his signature work, "Rise" (1993), and in "Castles" (2004), his dancers move so fast that they must be speaking with a New York accent. Not that there's anything wrong with that. The unison dancing that occasionally breaks through the asynchronistic, ribbon movement patterns is deeply satisfying, an echo of the lucid and clear moments we occasionally experience before they dissolve, almost unnoticed, into our multitasking lives.

Yet stillness is also powerful in Varone's work, like the silences we engage in at awkward, intense or deep moments. That stillness is amplified in "Boats Leaving," the premiere funded by the Doris Duke Awards.

Dropping the accent, the fast-moving tongue and the familiar conversations, Varone immerses himself in the moments in between — the silences, stillnesses, the deeper story. He slows it all down as the dancers, dressed in shabby street clothes designed by Liz Prince, linger in each arresting image. Under Jane Cox's dusky, menacing lighting against Arvo Pärt's mournful "Te Deum," he moves the whole conversation into new emotionally treacherous waters.

Varone's dances are always about relationships and community, and in this astonishingly beautiful and disturbing work, he has the courage to take us inside the darkness of communities unraveling. It gives the feeling that the people are being swept away from the small communities they have built for centuries, that healthy interdependence begins to fall apart and become a liability. At moments the aggrieved become the aggressor.

Varone's dancers are exceptional. Adriane Fang has an uncanny way of becoming the dance, entwining herself in each second, and all the while, the delicate wisps of her coal black hair seem to know where her big toe is. John Beasant III (Varone's alter ego) embodies drama, moving with fire, yet he can stop to consider Fang's extended arm before deciding what to do with it.

Eddie Taketa and Ryan Corriston couldn't have more polarity if they tried: The former, small and lithe, moves like someone who could slip in and out before you knew it but leave you with a lot to think about. Corriston has a threatening presence; he could wrestle you down, then gently swoop you into his muscular arms. Each of the four other dancers brings a particular personality and physicality to Varone's architectural landscapes in this 20th year of his company.

In other choreographers' hands "Boats Leaving" could