

Take Me With You

By **Deborah Jowitt**

November 1 – 7, 2006

Watching a work by Doug Varone, I think, "These are my people." So, I suspect, do many in the audience. The members of his company are superb dancers, but Varone's choreography—with its hesitations, awkward tenderness, bravery, and belligerence—emphasizes their humanity. And he weaves all the apparent contradictions and changes of intent into a tide of movement in which push and pull, fall and spring up, caress and spurn, eddy together. Images surfacing from the full-bodied dancing stir memories and run along our nerves.

In celebration of the company's 20th anniversary, Varone offers a world premiere, *Lux*; a New York premiere, *Boats Leaving* (2006); and the superb 2004 *Castles*. Of these, only the last has extended duets—one for Natalie Desch and Eddie Taketa in which love and anger stumble and crawl through their bodies, binding them ineluctably together. The encounter between Daniel Charon and John Beasant III is accompanied by one of the more furious of the Prokofiev waltzes that make up *Castles'* score; their roughhouse bonding and evasive tenderness might be happening in a men's room, judging by the way one straightens his tie in an imaginary mirror before they part. In the rest of *Castles* and both the newer works, groups come and go in evolving patterns.

In *Boats*, eight people (the four mentioned plus Ryan Corrison, Adriane Fang, Stephanie Liapis, and Belinda McGuire) seem, like refugees, to be preparing for a journey whose outcome is doubtful. In this liminal world defined by Arvo Pärt's haunting *Te Deum*, Jane Cox's fine lighting, and Liz Prince's gray costumes, bleakness occasionally gives way to the glow of spiritual promise. The many tableaux conveying grief, loss, and conflict—but also hope—often appear as if frozen by a hidden camera. Someone falls and others gather around; four sets of hands brace a leaning body. The dancers—rushing, shuddering, collapsing, scrabbling along the floor, or hurling themselves into the air—are always aware of their need for one another. Sometimes they travel in a cluster that constantly changes its internal shape, the way one film montage might dissolve into another. One by one, they exit, along a single path, into the unknown dark that lies beyond the stage.



Varone's company in *Lux*

photo: Richard Termine

Doug Varone and Dancers

Joyce Theater

October 24 through 29

Lux suffers a little by being last on the program. Set to Philip Glass's *The Light* (with those familiar Glassian harmonies and repeating rhythmic patterns), the piece, powerful and touching as it is, seems to wander on and on. Beginning with Varone's meditative, resilient exploration of the space around him, *Lux* seems to progress toward optimism, as a projected moon (lighting by Robert Wierzel) slowly rises on the backdrop, and the performers (wearing Liz Prince's handsome, intriguingly cut black costumes with slits that show a paler lining) take pleasure in their richly convivial celebration. *Lux* sates you with dancing, but you're still reluctant to leave the feast.