

**Gowanus Wildlife Preserve Showcase #6:  
“A Whirlwind Grand Tour”  
by Louise J. Sunshine**

The Gowanus Wildlife Preserve Concert Series offers choreographers of all styles and at all stages of development the increasingly rare opportunity to show their work. In Showcase #6 (11/3/07), works by mature artists shared the bill with their junior colleagues. If no new ground was broken, the showcase was a reminder that, in the right hands, even familiar forms and themes can excite and surprise.

Sarah Council’s “Hold Sway” is a duet whose formal rigor simmers with emotional heat. Through simple movement themes and their fast, near-obsessive repetition and variation, a drama of shifting power unfolds. Casting the excellent Kathryn Bringle and Sarah Pope mirrors the choreographic plan - the two look like sisters, possibly twins: both are blond and fair; both wear sand-colored pants and striped tops; both dance with unfettered clarity and liveliness of attack. Council keeps them moving to Zoe Keating’s propulsive score - meeting and parting, giving and taking each other’s weight, pulling off-balance and setting aright - in a tight square of stage.

The dance opens with Pope hoisting Bringle over her shoulder like a sack of potatoes. She lowers Bringle to her feet and they lunge, Pope pressing down on the back of Bringle’s head. They stand side-by-side, Pope’s arm a lead drape round Bringle’s neck. She grabs Bringle’s hand, forces her off her axis, pulls her back again. Sure, Pope dominates, but Bringle, rather than appearing submissive or weak, seems to patiently withhold comment, as sisters often do. Finally, after a variation that takes the two in broader, independent circles of space, the balance of power tips. We’re watching the same gestures - it’s still Pope looping her arm around Bringle’s neck, Pope lifting Bringle as before - but now it’s Bringle who seems the stronger and Pope’s arm seems less yoke than ribbon, the lift one of tenderness or need.

Nicoll + Oreck’s “*Hic + Nunc*,” belongs to the movement theater tradition (!) of groups like The Talking Band and Otrabanda and shares their gift for social commentary of the sustained loopiness variety. Co-directors/choreographers Jessica Nicoll and Barry Oreck spoof the modern mania for communication devices, technology we wind up using to alienate rather than connect. In a preamble to the vignettes that follow, actors Laura Livingston and Mike Durkin stand downstage, poker-faced, and deliver a safety primer for the “art” we are about to see. They point out exits and bathrooms, alert us to the dangers the performers may face and, by the way, is there a doctor in the house just in case? Is there a *pretend* doctor for the only *apparently* dangerous? And so on, ending with a lesson in emergency hand signals we should know, ranging from *I do not understand* to *biological chemical nuclear attack*.

Properly equipped, we settle in to watch a couple, Nicoll and Oreck - who convey just the right touch of clueless romanticism and wry pragmatism, respectively - “relate.” They sit in chairs as though on different yard lines and gaze off at opposite vistas. She tries to tell him a story, something that happened to her; he interrupts with rhapsodies over the passing scene. She objects to the interruptions; he chides her for failing to experience “the moment.” Livingston and Durkin, in the guise of behavioral researchers, observe, comment and then clip retractable leashes to their subjects’ belts. As Nicoll and Oreck move about the stage, the leashes become a giant cat’s cradle that traps them in its web. The researchers unleash them and all hell breaks loose, as the space is flooded with doll-sized strollers zooming in from the wings. Even the researchers get lost, rolling off their seats and into the messy tide.

More zaniness ensues. There’s threat of impending disaster and the audience is called into service - remember those emergency hand signals? - until Nicoll and Oreck are once again at sea: he’s forgotten . . . his password. *Can I have your password?* he begs. *I’m not giving you my password!* she snaps. They reach out to each other across the abyss, and the lights go down.

Where technology fails, the harmonies and pulsing rhythms of BaTuBa Percussions emphatically succeed. Warmth radiated from the stage as Gena C. Jefferson, Corey Myers and Gabriella Dennery welcomed us with the Liberian chant, “*Falanga Alafia*.” Three more songs followed, a mix of traditional melodies, drumming and lyrics from West Guinea and Yoruba, and, in the case of “Monday Blues,” Dennery’s lyrics, which seemed to have traveled north straight from the heart of the Delta.

A more innocent yesteryear was evoked by RedWall Dance Theatre's crowd-pleasing "Graceless," a suite of dances by Mary Ann Wall set to Elvis Presley songs. It's prom night, the girls are in their floral dresses, but the dew on their cheeks shouldn't fool you. Lust hides beneath their petticoats and Presley's voice is provocation enough to set their rumps in the air. Elizabeth Bragg, Elizabeth Prather, Mindy Rebman, and Cynthia Anne Stanley (Stacey Kaplan did not perform the night I went) were convincing as the sex-starved teens and breathed life into a familiar cliché.

Jacques Brel's "*Dans le port d'Amsterdam*" inspired Eva Perrotta's "Forgotten Mine," a duet of sexual manipulation and dependence danced athletically and with great commitment by Holly Colino and Samir M'Kirech. Though blindfolded like a torture victim throughout, Colino threw her body through space as if she were fully sighted. Were we watching the miraculous or was the blindfold merely decorative? Whatever the case may be, that accessory felt gratuitous and the final moment - the removal of the blindfold - undercut the drama that had preceded.

Dances by Marsha Parrilla, Betsy Miller and Chris Jasen Dance seemed like preliminary studies for longer works. In Parrilla's solo "*Caricia*," a woman revels in her own lush physicality and Parrilla performed her dance with spontaneity and unforced sensuality. Miller's earnest "Night Passage" suggests a private journey through a dark wood. A string concerto by Philip Glass dictates an ominous mood, yet the authority of Miller's elegant, sweeping limbs seemed to unintentionally contradict the look of worry on her face. In Jasen's duet "*Fiaba*" (Italian for "fairytale"), Katie Dorn and Cristina Jasen portrayed playful, simian-like creatures that explored the space and performed contact improvisation movements wearing long full skirts. The atmospheric sound score - thunderous rumbling, then a sweet-sounding women's choir, then storm troopers boots - seemed to more clearly articulate intent than did either the choreography or characterizations.

Watching a performance showcase is a little like taking off on a Grand Tour . . . in triple time: audience members barely have time to register one artist's style and sensibility before the next steps onto the stage. Yet while most audience members show up just to applaud their artist-friends, they leave having sampled unexpected riches. *Brava* and *bravo* to all.