

## Helen Simoneau Danse BAM Fisher



Saturday June 7, 2014 7:30pm

By Jamie Townsend

No dancer ever moves alone. Whether it's the receptive energy of an audience, or peers, teachers, and often most importantly, collaborators, dance, like all of the arts, is something presupposes interaction and community. Award-winning choreographer and dancer Helen Simoneau understands this dynamic intrinsically and her work clearly bears the marks of someone deeply invested in what sort of energies can emerge from collaboration. Over the course of a compelling 75 minute program Helen Simoneau Danse's performance at BAM's Fishman Space energetically explored the various tensions and overlaps between solo and ensemble work, as well as the co-creative force of dancers and choreographers working together.

Of the three Simoneau pieces presented at BAM, the first and the last were NYC premier works, developed by Simoneau in tandem with dancers in her company. The evening opened with "Paper Wings", an all-female ensemble piece originally developed for and premiered at the 2012 Footprints performance at American Dance Festival. Divided into four distinct yet interwoven sections "Paper Wings" explored the relationships and thematic connections between seeming opposites. The juxtaposition of fluid and mechanical movement at the piece's opening gave way to an energetic braiding of these two forms, deftly evoking a sense of the piece's titular image, dreams of delicate flying machines and the precarious bodies that pilot them. The visual meter tying these elements together throughout took the form of staggered vignettes of individual and multiple dancers over the duration of the piece; different groupings of bodies moving rigidly in ensemble patterns who suddenly broke off to perform wild highly gestural and acrobatic solo stanzas.

This complex interaction between individuals in the company also seemed to be evident in the sources that Helen and her collaborators drew from in developing throughout the evening's collection of choreography. Elements of contemporary street dance and footwork (particularly an affinity for quick transitions between tension and release, popping and locking) found natural correspondence in highly athletic and stylized maneuvers that evoked Wushu combat, where the emphasis of battle, competition, and individual flair in both meet the regimentation of the ensemble.

Simoneau's second piece of the evening, a repertory performance of The A.W.A.R.D. Show!-winning "the gentleness was in her hands" seemed an interesting choice among a gathering of work so clearly indebted to questions of collaboration. A solo work, performed by the choreographer herself, the immediate stillness of this piece quickly resolved into a series of movements recalling the opening performance's striking disjunctions. Extreme controlled extensions and ballerina-esque poses butted up against elements drawn from circus tumbling routines and gymnastic floor exercises. This staggering of smooth delicacy and frenetic energy evoked a multiplicity of personalities of permutations emanating from a single body, implicating the audience as well as to their expectations of what this piece, at any moment, could be.

"among the newly familiar", the final piece of the performance, was also the most narrative and far-reaching. Like the opening work "among..." was performed by an ensemble who collectively aided in its development, but differed in that it was composed largely of men, save Helen and Danse member Candace Scarborough. The longest and most complex piece in the evening "among..." tied together stylistic cues from the previous pieces, continuing to examine the fluidity between seeming opposites while presenting an impressionistic arc displaying life of bodies in relationship to each other. It was particularly effective in its presentation of gendered bodies watching each other, interacting, shifting and finally transforming in tandem with the piece's bricolage of dance styles. While a bit overlong, and at certain points meandering, "among..." served as an appropriate wrap-up to Helen and company's maximalist explorations. As the evening ended with the company sliding to the floor in unison to lay face up, I was immediately reminded that even when a performance is finished or body is at rest the echo of its gestures sound out our inextricably connections.