

Helen Simoneau  
April 16-18 2009  
Joyce SoHo, NYC

Fabulous Cast, Light Surprise Mesh with Emerging Craft.  
By Anne Mercurio

Helen Simoneau is from Quebec, Canada and trained in North Carolina (School of the Arts). The combination of the two places creates a dash of French/Canadian themes with a delightful crop of dancers. *Celui Qui Regarde*, the first piece, is a treat of choreographic craft and imagery with a balanced depth of characters. The costumes by Renee Kurz and Lisa Weller shape and showcase female strength in open backed dresses with deep red skirts. The three dancers perform infinitely unique movement, both musical and surprising. The work is satisfying and sweeping paired with gestural and detail intent. Eventually the women artfully discard their skirts, establishing a line of red puddles reminiscent of fallen flowers. Dancers Gena Mann, Catherine Miller and Adrienne Westwood are supple, strong, grounded, and technical. Gorgeous.

My excitement to see the second piece (considering my joy of experiencing the first) ended in disappointment. *Flight Distance* does not even approach *Celui Qui Regarde's* permeating sense of finished. The dancers are lovely – precise and grounded – with special note to the duet that occurred in a half-stage of light – Perhaps a story of a relationship in a daily routine with lost connection or a couple together but experiencing too many differences. Either way it speaks to the strength of the section that the thoughts occurred. However, overall, the craft of the piece was not complete. I would look forward to seeing this work after another round of development.

Ms. Simoneau performed a solo entitled *The gentleness was in her hands* with small glowing cubes set in three corners on the stage as her only lighting. Walking into the space the tiny Simoneau walks the space, then angles that are twisted, extreme shapes take over her body. In an unusual moment of complete and untwisted stillness, she sits center stage with a riveting vulnerability, swaying gently with eyes closed. This lasts for a lovely, extended period of time...enhancing a sense of purposeful defenselessness. There is an overlay in this work between extreme and extremely human, human and doll. Her body finds contorted positions and unfolds to moments of a woman quietly sitting, feeling the air around her. The end of the piece arrives suddenly greeted by a large cheer from the back row. I was excited by the end, yet very aware that I must have missed something.

I felt compelled to go back over what I had seen: She was in the middle of the stage. She turned to face each of the lights with gentle grace – this time however, at each facing the lights turn, off, off and off – leaving the stage black – Is it the technical cue that causes the uproar? Was there a crowning moment of the dance that I missed as a first time observer? I may never know.

The final work of the evening is a terrific choice of playful movement – *Adventures in a Foreign Land* includes Jonathan Melville Pratt as DJ live on stage mixing soundscapes and melodies. The cast of dancers, Lindsey Fisher, Manelich Minniefee, Phillip Montana and Adrienne Westwood, have been tossed to this landscape where they move about on their forearms, get slammed into walls and dangle off of precipices. The fabulous facial expressions and character work make this piece as enjoyable and transformative as the first piece.

Helene Simoneau is a talented dancer and choreographer; her ability to shape movement that invokes imagery is powerful and given time to craft, creates pieces that float beautifully between imagery and purpose.