

KATE WEARE TAKES AIM: NEW YORK PREMIERE OF "MARKSMAN"



Thryn Saxon, Kayla Farrish, Douglas Gillespie, Julian De Leon, Nicole Diaz, and Ryan Rouland Smith, Photo: Keira Heu-Jwyn Chang

“When it comes time to nudge your friends past the likes of, say, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater or New York City Ballet, why not gently suggest Kate Weare Company, with its true choreographic rigor and sensuous pleasures, as a good next step?”

November 10, 2016 - Infinite Body by Eva Yaa Asantewaa

As Kate Weare Company begins *Marksman*, two dancers stand close to each other on the open Joyce Theater stage. The woman bends away from the man, her supple torso sprung and hanging backward towards the floor. It's an odd shape, billowing yet tense as a bow and the pulled string of a bow. Its design, like all that follow over the coming hour, emphasizes form and heft more than literal meaning. This dancer is the first piece you might pluck from the jumbled pile in a jigsaw puzzle box. She's vividly three-dimensional, though, and abstract. You eye her irregular edge and see how it might belong with that other curious piece over there. And, in fact, from the audience's point of view, the two dancers fit together; one slips in front of the other to create the illusion of a multi-limbed body.

In Kate Weare's statement about the work, citing all she has learned from nature and childbirth, she writes about her sense that "we are always forming while being formed, playing while being played, aiming while being aimed." Nature, in other words, works its powerful will through us despite our belief that we are in control.

In *Marksman*, Weare makes silky beauty out of a flow of oddities and oddballs, puzzle pieces with shapes that conveniently function well together in every fleeting moment. A sudden, well-placed touch or flick of the hand, one dancer to another, propels a cascade of undulant reactions in the receiver's body. At times, Weare shows us two pairs of dancers, side by side, each pair performing identical luxuriant sequences. Their "marksman" selves must stay alert and attuned because both dancer and environment are always changing.

The troupe--including newcomers Kayla Farrish and Thryn Saxon--performs with lovely skill and cohesion. Watching *Marksman*, I had a funny thought. When it comes time to nudge your friends past the likes of, say, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater or New York City Ballet, why not gently suggest Kate Weare Company, with its true choreographic rigor and sensuous pleasures, as a good next step?

DOUBLE FEATURE



Nicole Diaz & Kayla Farrish, Photo: Yi-Chun Wu

“Weare’s dancers generate a heat that seems to come from the glide and pressure and quick brush of skin against skin, and against the skein of air between moving bodies.”

November 13, 2016 - Arts Journal's Dance Beat by Deborah Jowitz

It's rare to see, on two adjoining nights, two hour-long dances by two gifted, highly original choreographers who were born and raised in California (a native Californian myself, I couldn't resist throwing in that last commonality). The distinctive styles that Kate Weare and Liz Gerring have developed are nothing alike, yet several things about Weare's *Marksman* at the Joyce Theater and Gerring's (T)here to (T) here at the Baryshnikov Arts Center struck me as akin.

Both works have casts of six, three men and three women each. Neither tells a story. Both are performed to commissioned scores. On another level, both suggest small communities with their own diverse conventions and rituals. If the dancers look toward the audience, they don't appear to see us; they peruse a horizon. Fascinated by the two works, I nevertheless found myself becoming slightly restless near the end of each. Perhaps this is because they're like games whose rules and outcome we don't know, or like rich fruitcakes, in which every slice is full of contrasting sweetmeats, but not that different from the next slice.

Weare's *Marksman* is a development of her 2015 trio, *Unstruck*. It begins the same way, with two dancers, Nicole Diaz and Julian De Leon standing close together center stage in a pool of light (lighting design: Mike Faba). Curtis Robert MacDonald's score (heard on tape) for saxophones, piano, electric guitar, acoustic bass, and melodica begins with a low groaning. At the rear of the stage, in Clifford Ross's design, the slightly parted black backdrop reveals what could almost be a thin slice of dark forest against clouds. Diaz is arched back, her chest to the sky, her gaze upward. Why, you think, would anyone want to stand like that for this long? Julian De Leon shapes his body around her, against her, intersecting with her, as if trying—in a dreamy yet probing way—to sense what she's like.

This brief duet introduces qualities that pervade the work, through all the collaborations, the comings together, and the separations. Few dances are as sensual as Weare's, yet standard embraces don't play much of a role. Instead, you feel the intensity of the performers' gaze, the way one might be investigating another's scent or feeling the softness of his/her skin. In contrast to this kind of intimacy and yet in collusion with it, a dancer may unexpectedly flick a hand

against another's neck or push someone into a crouch. For the most part, struggle and sharp physical retorts arise from and return to tenderness. These people know one another's sensitive spots, and sometimes those sly, almost offhand blows are almost shocking.

Another pair (Douglas Gillespie and Kayla Farrish) joins De Leon and Diaz onstage, but these two have their own ways of exploring how they might connect. As do Thryn Saxon and Ryan Roulard Smith. (All the dancers are credited as “creative collaborators,” and that may be one reason they move so fully and sensitively, both alone and together.)

It's interesting the effect that a familiar structural element in dance has in this context. When two couples perform equally intimate duets in unison, you don't think there's been a stylistic turnaround, you just think, “so this is the way they live.” Or, “yes, certain ‘jobs’ require certain precise moves and tempos.”

Weare's choreography for this sextet continues to explore the trio imagery she introduced in *Unstruck*. Arms around one another, two sets of three dancers lope around the space. De Leon and Smith crush Diaz between them, and the pressure propels her upward into a lift. However, all six clump up and pulse or jiggle. They lean together and droop. People keep leaving and returning. Sometimes furtive and not-so-furtive violence crops up. At a point when the vivid music is quaking and groaning, I write words like “head butt,” “wrench,” “sock,” and (harder to detect) “pinch.” But much of the animosity happens on the run, or bubbles up and subsides in an ongoing flow of equanimity and vigorous movement. People not only struggle together; they aid or copy one another, and are there to catch someone who's falling. They can become (briefly) one another's project.

Wonderful performers all, Weare's dancers generate a heat that seems to come from the glide and pressure and quick brush of skin against skin, and against the skein of air between moving bodies. In the end, Diaz is again arched back, but this time her arms are lifted in a V. Not for the first time, I think about the dance's title, *Marksman*. How often, in life, are we precision shooters, in terms of setting our sights on what we think we want? Cupid's arrows sometimes missed their targets too.

KATE WEARE COMPANY



Ryan Rouland Smith, Douglas Gillespie, Thryn Saxon, Nicole Diaz, Kayla Farrish, Julian De Leon, Photo: Keira Heu-Jwyn Chang

“[Weare] probes deeply into the physical implications of movement, making it uniquely personal and thereby universal.”

November 13, 2016 - Solomons Says by Gus Solomons, Jr.

Kate Weare did not open her Joyce Theater season on the normal Tuesday – Election Day. And in light of the unforeseen results of that, the Wednesday night opening was not a full house. Many New Yorkers were either still immobile with shock and confusion or angrily marching in a yuge protest. However, those of us lucky enough to attend Weare’s opening were rewarded with the quintessential experience of art – thoughtful contemplation, kinetic exhilaration, and healing.

Weare’s new dance “Marksman” explores the notion that we are forming while being formed in the course of our interactions. The choreographer probes deeply into the physical implications of movement, making it uniquely personal and thereby universal. And her dancers are technically adept at making her refreshingly unlikely physical choices seem inevitable.

In “Marksman,” Weare has her cast let the leaning of their bodies propel them into trajectories in space. Other persistent motifs are a quick shuffling with the soles of the feet rooted to the ground like automatons traversing their assigned tracks; and spinning with elbows tucked and forearms sticking out like blades. Sharp accents with arms, spine, legs, and heads interrupt the liquid flow of the motion, like pebbles rippling water, drawing your attention to the shape or speed or point of connection at that instant.

Seamless transitions – loping runs in curved paths, tight circles of bodies in a circle dispersing, or stopping an expected exit midway – weave together episodes for individuals, pairs, and trios. Astutely placed group passages liven the visual texture, accelerate the tempo, or calm the atmosphere. An easy rapport among the dancers heightens their humanity and devotion to their assignment.

Lighting by Mike Faba throws dancers into high relief with stark, white side light and pools on the ground, or it casts their shadows onto Clifford Ross’s striking set – two full-length black fabric panels topped with white, foaming surf, like a breaker about to crash on a beach below – multiplying the virtual population. Weare, Faba, and Ross

skillfully modulate our focus to continually alter the perceived locale of the action.

Brooke Cohen dresses the cast in dark trousers with beige and tan tops; the fabric wafts with motion. The women’s blouses are backless with cowl fronts; the men’s are simple, sleeveless tunics. The costuming softens gender distinctions – since men and women equally share lifting and being lifted – and the soft fabric amplifies sharp little jolts that punctuate the smooth flow.

Weare seamlessly weaves together featured passages for every combination of dancers. In the opening duet, Nicole Diaz balances on one foot in a limpid arch in front of Julian De Leon, whose spine sinuously ripples; this arch and spinal sequencing, are also recurring motifs. When dancers connect in duets and trios, they do so in constantly unexpected ways. Seemingly without preparation, Douglas Gillespie lifts petite Kayla Farrish so her legs fly out horizontally, as they whip over the back of a crouching partner. In threes, a man or a woman will be buffeted between two partners. One energetic group passage is a contrapuntal conversation between two trios.

The dancers explore their physical limits both individually and with help from their colleagues. Often, a touch sparks an electric reaction throughout its recipient’s body. A duet for Thryn Saxon and Ryan Rouland Smith, both with long, linear silhouettes, implies violence with them nipping at each other, catching the other’s extremities with percussive sound. Gillespie’s quiet presence anchors the group.

Curtis Robert MacDonald has composed an evocative, original sound design score, using extended techniques on piano, saxophone, guitar, and melodica. The instruments are played in unconventional ways to produce aural textures that rarely sound instrumental. Percussive and ambient, never obtrusive, occasionally silent, the sound environment supports the dance without calling attention to itself. “Marksman” is dance art at its best; my concert companion – a novice to dance – doesn’t want it to end, and I agree.

IMPRESSIONS OF: KATE WEARE'S "MARKSMAN" AT THE JOYCE



Julian De Leon, Nicole Diaz, Photo: Keira Heu-Jwyn Chang

“Marksman exhibits the strength and exposure of the hunt by peeling back layers of modernity to reveal us in our most visceral form — as people versus nature.”

November 22, 2016 - The Dance Enthusiast by Theo Boguszewski

A lone woman (Kayla Farrish), upstage right, walks across the stage, but slowly, as if through honey. Another dancer crouches beneath Farrish, clutching her ankles and propelling her through space. Is Farrish moving of her own volition or is the other dancer forcing her forward? Does she want to be propelled forward? It's impossible to tell.

Kate Weare's latest work, presented by The Joyce Theater, explores the willfulness of humans as it intersects with the forces of nature. How much control do we have? How much is out of our control? Marksman exhibits the strength and exposure of the hunt by peeling back layers of modernity to reveal us in our most visceral form — as people versus nature.

Marksman draws from Zen in the Art of Archery, German philosophy professor Eugen Herrigel's account of learning Japanese bow marksmanship. The piece captivates in its subtle ritual. A constant energy simmers, even in moments of stillness.

Weare focuses on the group rather than the individual. There's an inherent Zen in the way the dancers work together, sculpting precarious structures with their bodies and then watching them disintegrate. A series of trust falls highlights the dancers' vulnerability and their unshakable faith in each other.

Brooke Cohen clothes the cast in neutral tones and loose, flowing fabric. Open in the back, the costumes bare the ripping muscles of the dancers' backs. The design of the human body is a force of nature.

Clifford Ross strikes a minimalist chord with his set. Two gray columns appear to descend from a photographed image of billowing white clouds, evoking a sense of calm against the dark backdrop. In combination with Mike Faba's stark lighting, it feels as if peering into another world. The dancers' shadows bounce off the columns, almost dancing with them.

Curtis Robert Macdonald's original score is sparse and otherworldly, with an alto saxophone carrying melodic refrains. A combination of sound design, composition and improvisation, it unfurls deliberately, with plenty of space.

The dancers are sometimes obviously human, sometimes not so much. Speedy, crouchy walks thrust them across the stage, insect-like. More often, as if panthers, they retreat and then barrel into space with vigor. The performers, though, are always present and hyper-aware.

In the first address to the audience, Farrish faces outwards, legs spread wide in a grand plié, arms outstretched as though holding the entire world. Her gesture, comforting and maternal, displays her humanity.

Having recently given birth for the first time, Weare had fresh reflections to delve into during the development of this piece. No longer the center of her universe, she celebrates the power of her body as a vessel for the creation of life. Marksman is a birth too, one created by and from her organically, like a breath: the rush of an inhale, the pause at the top with its acknowledgement of potential, and then the relief of an exhale. It's a mechanism beyond our control, which motivates and sustains — people and nature inextricably intertwined.

ARTISTIC AND ATHLETIC, KATE WEARE COMPANY WEARS IT WELL



Douglas Gillespie, Ryan Rouland Smith, Julian De Leon, Thryn Saxon, Nicole Diaz, Kayla Farrish, photo: Keira Heu-Jwyn Chang

“...a neo-primitive society of intimacy and aggression that is familiarly human, yet foreign and somehow more modern than ours.”

July 30, 2016 - The Portland Press Herald by Jennifer Brewer

LEWISTON — Kate Weare's dances live in a crazily graceful alternate universe, where bodies have the same parts and proportions as ours but their inhabitants have found different ways of articulating them.

Her dancers are exquisitely trained, with the ability – necessary for performing Weare's choreography – of passing from complicated floor work to elevated poses so smoothly that the segues become invisible.

Their lithe strength is such that a dancer can be held by others horizontally like a plank with little visible means of support, and then suddenly move on to a totally different sequence, without a sign that a superhuman feat has just been performed.

Friday's performance at the Bates Dance Festival was the first of two this weekend in Kate Weare Company's third visit to the festival since the company's inception a decade ago.

Internationally recognized as a groundbreaking choreographer, Weare has received awards including Guggenheim and Princess Grace fellowships, she has taught at such venues as Princeton University and Juilliard and her choreography has been commissioned by companies throughout the world.

The main event of this year's Bates program was “Marksman,” a new piece co-commissioned by The Joyce Theater and American Dance Festival, and only performed once before, earlier this summer.

The dance was inspired by Weare's fascination with “Zen in the Art of Archery,” by Eugen Herrigel. As Weare explains in her choreographer's statement, “The book articulates the most beautiful concept of forming while being formed, playing while being played, aiming while being aimed.”

In front of a Zen-inspired backdrop of waves atop giant dark panels, and wearing Asian-style costumes of wide capri trousers and flowing white shirts, the dancers of “Marksman” demonstrate the interweaving of actor and acted-upon suggested by Herrigel's philosophical work.

Dancers interact constantly, repeatedly inspired by or recoiling from a touch or gesture and sometimes moving like puppets on strings. Their roles are fluid, not assigned, so that in one moment one dancer is causing the movement of another, but in the next movement that dancer could be the one receiving the impact.

The choreography also includes thematic repetition of a triangular shape made by dancers' arms, like a bow, and single arms purposefully outstretched like arrows being aimed.

Weare's background in and affection for martial arts show up in this piece, as in others, with more or less subtle evocations in movement, tone and costuming. Dancers often spar or kick, while at other times they appear lost in individually meditative bodily convolutions.

There is constant, supersaturated motion, and occasions of unison among partners or the ensemble are so infrequent that the unrelenting counterpoint is virtually untraceable. Even the costumes seem part of the choreography, with flowing shirttails continuing a movement after the body has moved on to the next.

Whatever its intent, the effect of “Marksman” is abnormal, in a fascinating way. It's like a post-apocalyptic world in which, with our cherished technology and customs stripped, people move in a neo-primitive society of intimacy and aggression that is familiarly human, yet foreign and somehow more modern than ours.

In simple clothing that simultaneously glows and looks ragged, dancers' elegant, often-disjointed movement brings out repeatedly unexpected shapes, in a subtle, chronic divergence from the norm.

Feet are neither flexed nor pointed, legs and ankles are turned neither in nor out, legs are raised in ways that suggest slightly different hip construction.

The music, an original score by Curtis Robert Macdonald, is similarly earthy while otherworldly. It's as if our musical instruments and the urge to create with them existed while our theory and written works did not, leaving musicians to reinvent from a different perspective and sensibility.

Integral to the score is a signature instrument for this company: the dancers' breath. Panting and the rhythmic deep inhaling and exhaling of controlled breathing punctuate spaces of silence throughout Weare's work.

Kate Weare Company stands as an example of what the Bates Dance Festival is all about: a cutting-edge choreographer and a troupe of breathtaking artist-athletes offering both the festival's student dancers and its audiences a taste of something new.

KATE WEARE'S WORLD PREMIERE HITS THE MARK AT ADF



Thryn Saxon, Douglas Gillespie, Kellie Ann Lynch, photo: Grant Halverson

“Many images came to mind during the performance, including a baptism, an exorcism, a creature mothering its young and a wild beast being tamed. The amazingly limber dancers undulated, bounced, spun and fell, often in slow motion, indicating consummate control of every muscle.”

June 22, 2016 - The News & Observer by Roy C. Dicks

Kate Weare's "Marksman" had its world premiere Tuesday at the American Dance Festival, combining many of her well-established choreographic elements into an intriguing examination of action and reaction, tension and release, control and freedom.

Weare took her inspiration from a book about the art of Japanese archery, in which marksmanship is honed by focusing energy on the target but also by loosening energy to allow spiritual development ("aiming while being aimed").

Over the work's 55 minutes, that concept played out in ever-changing variations as three men and three women interacted in pairs and groups. In front of three dark fabric panels topped by ocean wave motifs (Clifford Ross, designer) and dressed in loose white pants with irregular tunics splashed with black (Sarah Cabbage, designer), the dancers created a world of ancient ritual and rites.

The atmosphere was enhanced by Mike Faba's shadowy, subtly evolving lighting, sometimes starkly cold, sometimes as if created by flaming embers. Curtis Robert Macdonald's original music, featuring piano, saxophone and acoustic bass, completed the otherworldly feel with sounds ranging from scratchy buzzing and percussive tapping to eerily plucked strings and bell-like reverberations.

Each combination of dancers took on different aspects of the focusing and loosening construct. A dancer might strike the stiffly posed torso of another, who would collapse like a puppet with a cut string. A dancer might hold the head of another, turning, caressing or pushing it and thereby molding the dancer into a desired shape. Sometimes, dancers would motion toward others as if with an invisible force, causing them to ricochet against a ring of dancers like pinballs.

Many images came to mind during the performance, including a baptism, an exorcism, a creature mothering its young and a wild beast being tamed. The amazingly limber dancers undulated, bounced, spun and fell, often in slow motion, indicating consummate control of every muscle. The unrelenting changes of balance, tension and energy demonstrated their prodigious talent.

Weare's seemingly limitless invention kept the piece moving, each segment lasting just long enough to establish its particular variation on the theme before the combination and mood altered. "Marksman" should prove one of the choreographer's most significant works.