

Reviews & Responses

Elastic Charisma

Victor Quijada's "Slicing Static" for Rubberbandance Group
by Philip Szporer

Montréal: Usine C: Sept. 21-25

Rubberbandance Group's "Slicing Static" explores dance and theatre, working thematically with the insecurity and the uncertainty of our lives. Choreographer Victor Quijada warms up the audience members as soon as they enter the big open theatre space of Usine C, a former jam factory in the city's east end that is home to the dance-theatre company Carbone 14. It has been totally re-configured for this show. Spectators linger on the dance floor, awaiting access to their seats. A voice on the amplifier announces, "Please listen to the following instructions," in French, English and Spanish. The announcement is made numerous times as the audience shuffles in.



Anne Plamondon /
Photo by Natalie Galazka

Finally, we're ushered to our allocated bleacher-style seating surrounding the rectangular dance floor, down two sides and angled along a third. A fourth group is tucked into another section at the back of the hall, high above the action. All locations provide good vantage points for the viewers. Another series of amplified voices indicates that the people in the red seats consider themselves to be good citizens; those in the blue seats have unfulfilled dreams, etc. The voices then let loose with a bubbling stream of information: "Sit upright and don't slouch", "Wait until after the show to move", "Do what I tell you to do", "Don't touch yourself there". The babble of voices builds into a cacophony of sound. After several minutes of this good-humored theatre, the lights fade to black.



Anne Plamondon and Victor Quijada /
Photo by Natalie Galazka

Quijada, the charismatic young artistic director of Rubberbandance, is a dancer-choreographer with a background in ballet, contemporary, hip hop and breakdance styles. His dancing life intersects with the likes of Rudy Perez, Twyla Tharp and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, all via hip hop and break from the early age of eight.

"Slicing Static" presents a feel-good approach to dance, never shying away from the articulation and freedom of hip hop or the abstraction and technique of neoclassical dance. Los Angeles-born Quijada (from Baldwin Hills in South Central) extends hip hop by expanding the form beyond the physical thrills and acrobatics of the club and street scene.

The dancing portion of the hour-long show opens with a spotlight on Jayko Eloï, a long lanky dancer who began his career with Montréal's Tactical Crew. He scoops the space with his arms, a rage builds within, and he proceeds to box with an invisible presence, two fists clenched. His movement is syncopated and his close contact with the floor is later echoed in the movements

of the other performers. We're then introduced to Kevin Turner, a dancer from northern England who came to Montréal expressly to work with Quijada after the two met at the Scottish Dance Theatre. He dances with a beautiful, languid energy.

Emmanuel Le Phan, also a member of the Solid State Breakdance Collective, by contrast, is the embodiment of strength. She has an eloquent sequence where she essentially hangs out in one spot, absorbed in her own vibe, like a frozen fraction of a second captured in a photograph. The impact of her quiet concentration is compelling. In another section, Turner and Le Phan have an interactive sequence where he evades her touch and grasp -- they twist and stop, and spin, and then stop abruptly. Anne Plamondon, a former member of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens and Nederlands Dans Theater 2, who is a fine contemporary dancer, has a fascinating acrobatic introduction, working the metal support structure of one of the bleachers like monkey bars. Later, on an upper balcony, Plamondon and a seated and impassive Quijada play out an interrogation-style section, replete with a dangling light bulb. If you choose not to turn your head to see the pair, you can watch their blown-up shadows play on the theatre wall.



Anne Plamondon and Victor Quijada /
Photo by Natalie Galazka

Further into the work, on the main stage, Quijada repeatedly lifts Plamondon and carries her to another spot; then Eloï does the same. When Turner dances with her, he looks massive next to her slight frame. Working with quick entrances and exits, Quijada returns for a pas de deux that also makes Plamondon look vulnerable, as he supports her by holding her foot and calf while she falls back.

Quijada, the choreographer, wants your attention. He doesn't just talk the talk, and he and his dancer crew follow through with full-bodied commitment. The dancers have an appealing physicality, no one more so than Quijada himself. I wish he danced more in "Slicing Static". Simply put, he's a magnetic performer and a remarkably expansive dancer. When he rises and breaks, tilting toward you, or works his way across the stage with bounding connection, he has an enthralling concentration. He seems to hold nothing back, and it's admirable how truly at home he is in his body.



Victor Quijada / Photo by Natalie Galazka

The score by Mitchell Akiyama is beautifully elastic, moving from electronica to urban jungle to jazz-infused rhythms. Yan Lee Chan's lighting is exquisite: a design that plays with the open space, fielding it in prisms. Another choice that proves highly effective in the overall mix of elements is the proximity of the dancers to most of the audience.

What Quijada accomplishes in "Slicing Static" is contradictory. He seems to choreograph the way I'd guess his mind works, in a non-linear fashion. He wants to take us to emotional and introspective places, but the narrative theatricality of the quarrelling couples, the aggressive confrontations and the tearful goodbyes is kind of ho-hum. What is engaging is Quijada's intriguing mix of styles and genres, and the wealth of information that he brings to his dance. There's no one else like him in Canada that I've seen, experimenting and refining a personal vision with such a unique blend of movement expertise -- from street to classical to post-modern -- and using it all in a full artistic expression. And, in a dance scene where the word "innovative" is over-applied and under-achieved, this is good news for all of us.