

DANCE

Kudelka's religious porn scores

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Canada Dance Festival

Final performances

In Ottawa, from June 8 to 10

The coveted closing-night spot at the Canada Dance Festival was given to Montreal's Coleman Lemieux & Compagnie. As well as presenting two James Kudelka classics (*Fifteen Heterosexual Duets*, 1991, and *Soudain, l'hiver dernier*, 1987), the evening included a new work Kudelka built around countertenor Daniel Taylor and his Theatre of Early Music.

The work, *it is as it was*, is insidious but fascinating. The title is Pope John Paul II's comment on Mel Gibson's 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ*. Kudelka's choreographic inquiry is "religious pornography," a term some critics applied to the film, and which Kudelka also sees in sensual baroque religious paintings, or in the "ecstasy" of listening to gorgeous religious music without thought to the sacred text.

As Taylor performs Vivaldi's *Stabat Mater*, the singer is undressed, fondled, kissed and embraced. In short, there is not one moment when he is given any peace by dancers Laurence Lemieux, Bill Coleman, Andrew Giday and Andrea Boardman. While they buzz around Taylor, the dancers also engage in some graphic sexual moments of their own.

The chameleon Kudelka has always defined his style by subject. His vocabulary here swings from simplistic natural movement to complex partnering. The effect is like the snake in the Garden of Eden, with the physicality twisting and turning with restless energy throughout the piece. Denis Lavoie has costumed the five in white, and the final image of Taylor putting his palms together in prayer is religious hypocrisy writ large.

Montreal choreographer Sylvain Émard's *Temps de chien (Dog Days)* is anchored in his intense, physical style. His movement is abstracted from everyday physicality and embellished with quirky hand and arm positions and abrupt pauses.

Temps de chien is the second piece of his *Climatology of bodies* series where climate -- read unsettled conditions -- is a metaphor for today's human experience. A moveable wall, with magnificent projected abstract colours and designs, helps to define the shifting dangers of the space. The six excellent dancers form a series of tortuous relationships and the various episodes represent their violent thoughts and stormy encounters.

Unbound, from Vancouver's Wen Wei Wang, is a class act of style and imagery. The choreographic point of departure is the old Chinese custom of bound feet to make women look more desirable. The three men and three women wear shoes taken from Peking Opera to give the illusion of bound feet, and one can instantly see the grace, poise and height that the footwear imposes on the dancers.

The work is made up of abstracted vignettes that show relationships to the shoes, whether a woman in sexual poses, two women expressing close friendship, or duets between victim and oppressor. I found the lighting dark and the work a bit too long, but Wang is an interesting new choreographic voice who produces thoughtful, polished work.

Ottawa-based Natasha Bakht, an excellent dancer trained in Indian bharatanatyam, presented a program of solos. Her lovely new work, *Still*, by Ottawa choreographer Yvonne Coutts, is inspired by a Rainer Maria Rilke text on solitude. Coutts begins slowly with deliberate pelvic swivels and firm arm gestures, but as the lighting moves from cool blue to bright orange, her choreography becomes more tumultuous, even hysterical.

A clever program featured Malgorzata Nowacka's Chimera Project from Toronto and Victor Quijada's Rubberbanddance from Montreal. Nowacka's remount of *Light Explorations of a Darker Nature* once again shows her muscular, vigorous Queen Street West sensibility overlying her quiet despair.

The Los Angeles-born Quijada was the top crowd pleaser at the festival with his fusion of hip hop and ballet presented to classical music. The best piece is the hilarious second half of *Mi Verano*, set to the drinking duet *Libiamo* from Verdi's *La Traviata*. The contrast of the hip-hoppers with the opera singers, as the former attempt to be arch and lofty, is an absolute delight. Rubberbanddance is clearly heading for international glory.