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Dance Review

Rubberbandance stretches dance styles to make something new

By Deborah Meyers

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RUBBERBANDance Group performs at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre until Feb. 23

When Victor Quijada brought his Rubberbandance to the Vancouver East Cultural Centre in 2008, he showed seven short works that juxtaposed music by Vivaldi, Verdi and Bach with a mongrel vocabulary of moves that referenced hip hop, ballet and contemporary dance, but was none of the above. The surprise was in how he combined things, and in the weightless, unaccented but deeply virtuosic content and phrasing of his dances. Here was a true original.

Five years later – too long a wait – the company is back with a 70-minute work, *Gravity of Center*. An ensemble piece for five dancers, *Gravity of Center* describes in dance terms the delicate, dangerous balance of group dynamics, the push/pull of being part of something bigger than you are.

In doing so, the LA-born, Montreal-based Quijada drew in part upon the street dance known as krumping, a raw and aggressive urban expression, often featured in competitive dance crews, but which was born as a dance outlet for anger and description of gang life.

In Gravity of Center, Quijada alters our expectations by smoothing out the edges. The dancers huddle, perform steps in unison or sequentially, shove individuals out, gather everybody in. Whether they are barrel-turning over each other's bodies, spinning carelessly on their heads or some other axis, or sliding eel-like through the spaces between them, the movement is so lyrical it is practically liquid.

It is also almost impossible to label it, an amalgam of street and concert dance that is hard for the eye to follow and hard to pin down, but has a sustained, authentic impact. It's like a perfume that smells like nothing recognizable. You can't describe it, and you can't get it out of your mind.

Only at the very end of the piece does the pack mentality break down when the beautiful, ballet-schooled Anne Plamendon rips up space with two startling, spectacular extensions, her foot up by her ear. It's a pair of exclamation marks that set her apart, and indeed the work ends with her downstage and alone.

Jasper Gahunia's classically influenced score, with its throbbing strings and narrative arc, contributes significantly to the sense of story that the piece carries with it. (Also known as DJ Lil' Jaz, Gahunia is a Royal Conservatory of Music-trained turntabalist.) Yan Lee Chan's lighting design builds an environment fit for a tribe of nocturnal creatures, in contest and at sober play.

What is it to be cast out? To be rescued? When does protecting become confining? These are questions Quijada explores in pure dance terms in Gravity of Center by means of a hybrid movement style that is quiet, emphatic and out there all on its own.

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