



Rural Intelligence

David Dorfman: Dance to the Music

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August 28, 2011



Prophets of Funk, an evening-length work performed by David Dorfman Dance this week at Jacob's Pillow, begins with the choreographer strutting his stuff diagonally across the stage on a path of light. He's no longer a young man, and he's taken on some pounds along with the years, but he's still got the moves – he can get down and funky, loose

and slinky, with the best of them. Before long, Raja Kelly, standing in for Sly Stone, aka Sylvester Stewart, frontman of *Sly and the Family Stone*, enters, with just as funky and slinky a groove as Dorfman's.

The diagonal light turns out to be a sort of memory lane, and for its first half, *Prophets of Funk*, Dorfman seems to be a joy ride, fueled by the infectious music of Sly and the Family Stone. No need to analyze, just sit back and enjoy the full-throttle non-stop, exuberant dancing: high-kicking, hip-swiveling, pelvis-thrusting, hand-standing, cartwheeling, back-flipping, floor-sliding, head bobbing, toe-tapping fun. The music, hippie costumes, frequently flashed peace signs, and video backdrop of vintage concert footage and psychedelia are a blast from the past, as are bygone dance elements like the bump and the pony, but watch carefully and





you'll see some time shifting, as later-era dance influences from disco, hip-hop, and the fly-girl idiom creep into the choreography.

After a while the dance takes a detour into darker territory – how could it not, when Sly and the Family Stone—which, as Dorfman points out in his program notes, was the first racially and gender-integrated bands in U.S. history—put out songs like *Don't Call Me Nigger, Whitey*. Dorfman

takes this opportunity to address issues of power and domination, subtle and overt, while moving more into the realm of dance theater. In addition to dancing full-out, company members are also called upon to perform monologues, pantomime, and even sing.



But in the end the troupe rides out of the darkness with a finale that brings the audience to its feet, and is surely one of the cleverest ways to guarantee a standing ovation. The work finishes on a high note, with more than half the audience out on the stage, heeding Sly's call to *Dance to the Music*. The performance transforms into a dance party, and since it's an audience of all ages, shapes, and backgrounds on the stage, dancing amidst the performers, it becomes obvious that, like Sly and the Family Stone, Dorfman really does love *Everyday People*. Is it a coincidence that just this week Sly Stone released a new album? Perhaps Dorfman's riding the zeitgeist, or maybe even helping to drive it.