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**Los Angeles Contemporary Dance Company**

**SUBTEXT**

**Diavolo Dance Theater November 18, 2011**

**By Steven Woodruff**

Reprising the format from LACDC's most recent production, **The Nature of Things** (May 2011), the company recently concluded its new repertory program at **Diavolo Dance Theater** with an evening of works by guest choreographers and LACDC Artistic Director, Kate Hutter, in a program titled **SUBTEXT**. Presenting works for the first time in conjunction with LACDC were Mike Esperanza, Artistic Director for **BARE** Dance Company and Holly Rothschild, who is a multidisciplinary choreographer and founding member of the music group, **String Theory**. While the title for the evening may have been more directly applicable to Rothschild's work, *The Better To See You With*, a freewheeling fantasy based on a darker backstory for *Little Red Riding Hood*, it also lent sense to Esperanza's, *A SILVER LINING* (based on Shel Silverstein's cartooning and poems) and Hutter's, *BUTTON AND CUFFS*, which realizes a version of dance based on heavy electronica and dance beats. What emerged was an evening of works that looked different but not always dancing that looked different. Call it an evolving style for LACDC or perhaps a default position for works that lean heavily on an evolving dependency on contact improvisation, sequences of choreographed dance (in the usual sense of the word) and a vocabulary of movement for a moving theater without words.

*Esperanza's A SILVER LINING* riffs on the humor and conflict inherent in play. The four member cast included Hutter, Genevieve Carson, Hyosun Choi and Jamila Glass. They carve up the stage by laying down tape in a random geometry and conclude pulling it up and wadding it into a giant ball. As the dancers walk away the ball is left lit on the stage--period. The journey is based on close contact improvising, often molding the dancers in interlocking configurations and a certain amount of facial mugging and body language that enhances the comic interactions. It's easier to feel and be funny when you don't know exactly what's coming next and that mostly played true in Saturday's performance. The costumes themselves (all white short sleeved dresses with applied graphics mimicking Silverstein's drawings) looked as if the original on paper drawings had been stitched into three dimensions. The music (thank you *Garage Band*), was a clever, multi section collage that at times sounded like a New Orleans street band and alternately, accompaniment for a sequence of circus mime. Both were by Esperanza, giving *A SILVER LINING* a clear cut unified design.

Hutter's *BUTTON AND CUFFS* takes its title (my guess) from the costuming conceit with which it begins. The six dancers are aligned at the back of the stage and in sequence come forward to dress in white, men's dress shirt, black pants and suit jackets. They undress eventually amidst frantic coming and going involving full tilt stage crossings and costume flinging. The work is multi-sectional with an at times hyper tense electronic score by Filip Zachary. The conclusion takes shape as unison finale, full of excess physicality. The cast included five women and one man. I'm not sure I understood the full measure of *BUTTON AND CUFFS*. The realization of a unified contemporary choreography with blistering electronic sounds may still be around the corner, but *BUTTON AND CUFFS* was a step in that direction.

The red meat on the evening's program was *THE BETTER TO SEE YOU WITH*, which takes the Red Riding Hood narrative hard core in a suite of dirty, pretty things and never looks back. We are familiar with the psychological underpinnings of much of so called children's literature. Here, Rothschild has in a sense, taken Dumas (I'm thinking *Nutcracker*) and stuffed it back full of the original, gritty Hoffman to create a dance fable that is utterly darkened and often creepy. Why you might ask? Possibly because dystopic narratives are ultimately more intriguing--and easier to deploy-- but it leaves the theatrical doors wide open for invention and there is no shortage of it here. From the beginning, with the projected images of slavering wolves and the set, a hanging forest, the trip to Grandma's cottage is looking pretty daunting.

Here, there is a film sequence of our heroine making her way through the forest and in the process downing Grandmother's wine and stuffing the pastries in her own face. There, a seminar of Drag Grandma's answering the kids hail of questions until one of the four impersonators screams, shut up. A recurring movement of the women seated or standing with undulating pelvises lets you know that the amazing animal sex may be at hand. Did I mention that the women's knees are bloodied. You can imagine what they've been up to. And so it goes. Perhaps in the end, there is too much unremitting ghastliness but Rothschild gets her lengthy, highly inventive tale to hold together.

There were some surprises too. In one long section the twelve member cast faces the audience; while standing nearly on top of the front row of seating they slowly shift facial expressions. Some cry, others burst out in laughter, some are expressionless. Set to *Caribou* by the Pixies, the moment becomes a minimalist feast. You realize that even a simple staging trick, mostly devoid of movement, can have a potent impact. Carrying much of the narrative was Drea Sobke, one of the heroines (there may have been others) who was a strong presence, whether on film or on stage. She acts and moves with authority and proved again that she can cover roles like this one securely. The quartet of men also was excellent. They were Michael Crotty, Justin Liu, Omar Olivas and Andrew Pearson. The score for *THE BETTER TO SEE YOU WITH* used already available music with some counter intuitive choices like the music of Tuesday Weld, Dean Martin and the Romanian Gypsy band, Taraf de Haidouks. Luke Rothschild engineered a workmanlike sound score from the varied recorded sources. Holly Rothschild and Hutter collaborated on the costuming. The cinematography was by Eric Mason. The direction was by Rothschild and included choreographic collaboration with the LACDC dancers.

The series has played to full houses, indicating that LACDC is building a growing downtown presence. The program was in part supported by the Los Angeles County Arts Commission. You can find out more about Los Angeles Contemporary Dance Company and upcoming concert events through their website at: <http://www.lacontemporarydance.org/>