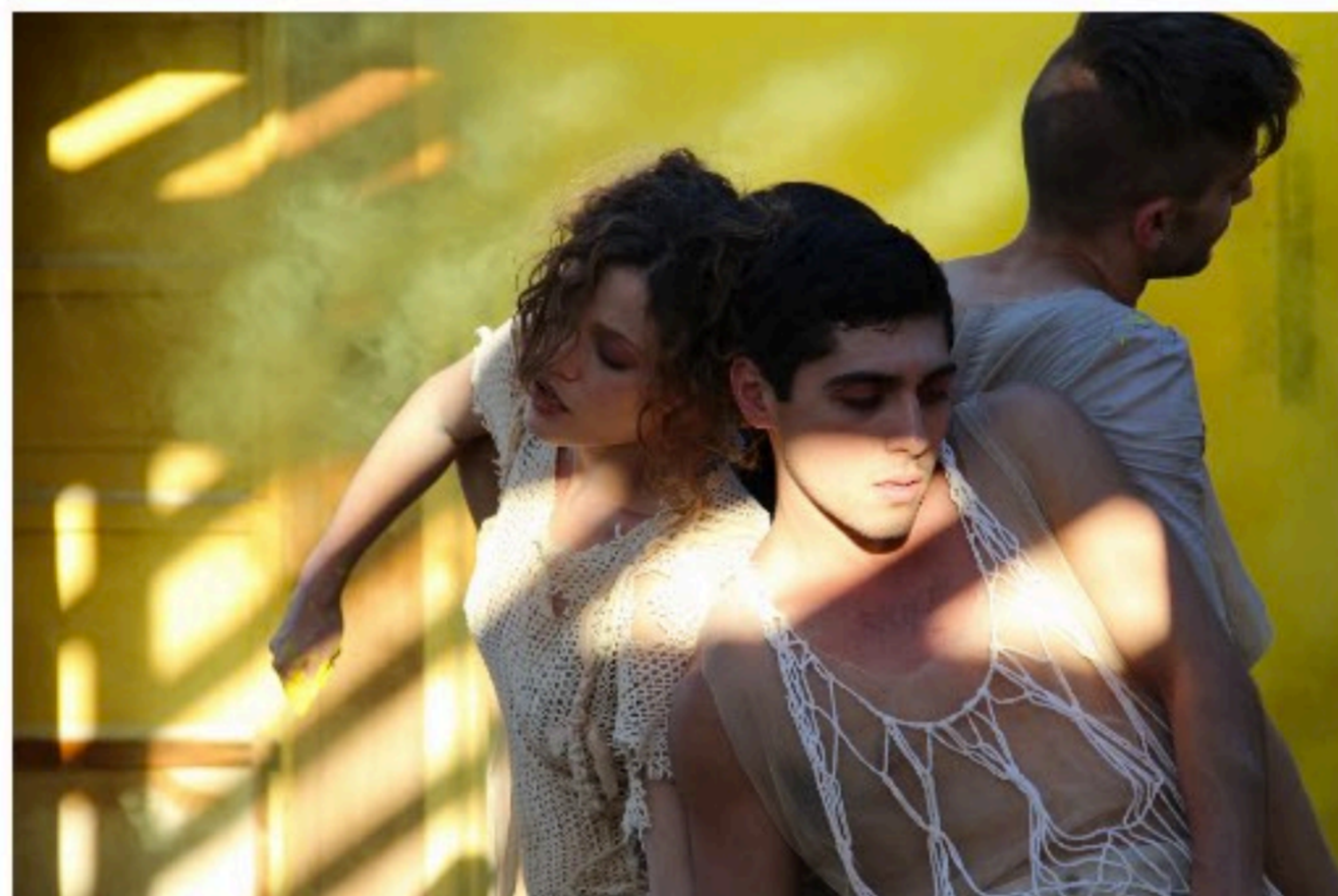


LA Contemporary Dance Company premieres *FAM*

★★★★☆ ?

By Jeff Slayton, 30 April 2016

LA Contemporary Dance Company premiered its evening long work *FAM* at the Los Angeles Theatre Center (LATC) in downtown Los Angeles. Choreographed by the company's new Artistic Director Genevieve Carson, *FAM* appears to have been created with this venue in mind. The audience walks down very steep steps to get to their seats in Theatre 3. I was in the tenth row, but it felt like I was in a mezzanine or balcony looking down on the performers. Because *FAM* involves dance, film, two moving panels and projections that cover the entire stage area, Theatre 3 was an ideal choice of venues for this work.



© Rob Amjarv

There is no front curtain in Theater 3 and for *FAM* the floor was white, the back wall bare gray cinder block, and no side leg curtains. The dancers entered one at a time to sit in a large circle as the last of the audience members took their seats. The costumes by Sami Martin Sarmiento are primarily white with a hint of orange or black. Upstage are two portable panels; also white. As the music started one dancer began walking around the circle to be joined by another and then another until all twelve moved together like a flock of birds. Suddenly they burst into aggressive and staccato-like movement, with everyone dancing in unison to a driving score by English electronic producer Jamie xx.

As this dynamic beginning came to an end, we were treated to a beautiful dance film directed by Nathan Kim. The film was shot at the Salton Sea located directly on the San Andreas Fault, and predominantly in California's Imperial and Coachella valleys. The cast dances near the water's edge, as well as in and around a deserted building and trailer. The film gives us a look into what our future might look like post climate change if nothing is done to reverse its effects.

As the film neared its conclusion, it literally moved down the back wall onto the white floor where live dancers continued to perform Carson's work. For me, this is where *FAM* began to unravel a bit without actually falling apart. I was actively involved during most of the work; and the projections on the floor and moving panels definitely held my interest. There were times, however, that I found my mind wandering and I had to pull my attention back into the theater. For example, there is a lengthy section that begins with dancer Drea Sobke seemingly in trouble and pulling away from the rest of the "FAMily". The others pull her in, surround her and try desperately to protect her. Sobke is finally entangled in three long white cloth panels and a laser-like light show overtakes the entire performance area. Although fascinating to look at, I could not connect this section to the rest of the dance. A section where Carson's idea or movement theme doesn't feel fully developed is the men's quartet which meanders seemingly without purpose.

Carson's work comes back into focus with a duet featuring Tess Hewlett and Joe Badalamenti. Separated at first by the two portable panels, the couple eventually discover each other. Like two in-the-wild creatures, each takes a submissive stance before accepting each other as partners. A head is nestled into the other's bent elbow or neck. They take turns grasping the other's head in one hand or directing the other to move by using different parts of their body. It is a beautiful, tender and at times creature-like duet performed with great precision and loving care by Hewlett and Badalamenti.

There is a lot to see in *FAM*. There are wonderful performances given by the entire cast of dancers, with special mention to Hewlett, Badalamenti, Hyosun Choi, Angel Tyson and Andrew Pearson. Nathan Kim's film and Keith Stretch's Video Designs are outstanding, as is Ric Zimmerman's lighting. Sarmiento's costumes are flattering to a few dancers, but very distracting on others. There are gaps that need her attention but Genevieve Carson's *FAM* is a major work that should be seen.

SEE FULL LISTING

"a major work that should be seen"

Reviewed at L.A. Theatre Center, Los Angeles on 29 April 2016

PROGRAMME

FAM

PERFORMERS

LA Contemporary Dance Company

Sami Martin Sarmiento, *Costume Designer*

Drea Sobke, *Dancer*

Joe Badalamenti, *Dancer*

Hyosun Choi, *Dancer*

Angel Tyson, *Dancer*

Andrew Pearson, *Dancer*

Ric Zimmerman, *Lighting Designer*

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★★★★★

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★★★★☆

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