



Friday, November 8, 2013

Review: (Montreal) Native Girl Syndrome



A Beautiful Act of Falling Apart

by Chad Dembski

A mood is set from the moment the audience enters the Monument National Studio space and warbling electronic music fills the space and the two performers slowly sway on the spot on the far right side of the stage. Both performers have a multi-layered costume that is both haphazard and also carefully constructed in places.

Tangente is a well known dance presentation company that has presented most of Quebec's independent choreographers and also presents other artists from Canada and the rest of the world as well. Their ambitious programming encourages brave choices, independence and allowing the artist voice to come through.

Lara Kramer is an independent dance artist who graduated from the contemporary dance program at Concordia in 2008 and is originally from London, Ontario. She has been presenting works steadily since graduating with previous showings at the MAI in Montreal (2011), the Talking Sticks festival in Vancouver, The Banff Centre, and the Canada Dance Festival just to name a few. Native Girl Syndrome (NGS) is her first feature length work and her first featuring other dancers other than herself.

NGS is based on Lara's grandmother's experiences at a residential school and the term Native Girl Syndrome comes from the Nuns at the school. It refers offensively to the time when the girls would leave the schools and that most of them would end up being drug addicts, alcoholics and living on the street. This term is used as a foundation to explore deeper issues of the aftereffects of residential schools, colonialism, genocide and the cycle of addiction. This piece explores the effect her grandmother's experience had on her, her mother and herself.

The piece displays a deep sadness from the outset as the two dancers struggle to simply get across the stage with the baby carriers full of various items. They seem both strong and determined while also suffering from abuse of both substances and other people over the years. Their youth shines through their eyes but their twisting and slowly contorting bodies relay a broken human who can barely go on. While the work is quite slow at times, this pacing draws you into their world and places you in discomfort and out of the cozy world of simply watching a contemporary dance show.

Two sections of electric explosion where bodies and objects go all over the stage are well placed amongst a dream-like pace and tone in most of the piece. These disruptions are a more in-your-face approach that reminded me of when I am uncomfortably approached by homeless people on the street. It shows me my basic understanding of suffering and how much we all avoid having to deal with our history and ignorance towards poverty and addiction.

The performers allow themselves to be vulnerable instead of relying on the obvious technique and skill to display the truth behind these characters. It is this commitment to character that helps NGS go beyond simply a political piece but become a powerful expression of the brutal effects of residential schools in Canada to this day.

While not always a pleasure to watch in the conventional sense, NGS is an important and original voice in Montreal and Canadian dance and constantly intriguing. This is the première of this version of the piece (it had a previous version workshopped in Vancouver in 2012) and will continue to have life next year in Ottawa at the Canada Dance Festival and various other venues across Canada.

[Native Girl Syndrome runs Nov. 7 - 10](#)

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