

Keigwin + Company at Annenberg

Straightforward and unpretentious, but is it art?

Gary L. Day

November 26, 2013 in *Dance*

Share:      

The endless argument about the relative value of “high” or “serious” art vs. “popular culture” or (most condescendingly) “mere entertainment” is familiar to all of us. There’s no crime in being popular entertainment; conversely, serious art can often descend into pretentious snobbery. In the end, the only relevant questions should be: How good is it? And does it succeed at what it attempts to do?



Keigwin knows how to push an audience's buttons.

Those questions most certainly must be applied to Keigwin + Company, Dance Celebration’s latest modern dance presentation at the Annenberg Center.

The company’s artistic director, Larry Keigwin, clearly aims for a pop cultural response. His work is straightforward, unpretentious and appeals to a mainstream sensibility. As such, it should be judged on the basis of its intentions. Does it appeal to its targeted mainstream audience? Judging from the enthusiastic reaction of the audience at the performance I attended, I’d say yes.

Vivaldi and Sinatra

My own reaction, however, was somewhat less sanguine. I found the presentation deeply flawed, and consequently less successful than it could have been.

Larry Keigwin usually choreographs to popular music, both classical and contemporary but all recognizable. This program featured Vivaldi, Aretha Franklin and Roy Orbison, as well as an entire section set to Frank Sinatra. No one’s musical palate was expanded at *this* show.

The dancers were an attractive and talented group— better than their material. The three male members were well featured in a short homoerotic piece called *Three Way*, while the women acquitted themselves well in the female-centric *Girls*, featuring the Sinatra soundtrack. These two pieces proved to be the high points of the evening.

Cutesy and trite

Elsewhere, the choreography often edged into obviousness and repetition. To be sure, numerous bits sprinkled throughout were meant to be clever, and the audience responded with appropriate delight; but I found them cutesy and even sometimes trite. Breaking the fourth wall and mugging at the audience may elicit the desired laugh, but it can just as easily be intrusive and pandering. Something is either humorous or it’s not, but one should never milk it for a laugh.

And it’s been a while since I’ve seen a show as poorly lit as this one. Burke Wilmore’s lights were drab and unimaginative, and the frequent use of harsh, unfiltered white light made the dancers appear sallow, haggard and altogether unattractive. I doubt that that was the intent, but there it was.

Overall, I can’t say I enjoyed the program very much— but that could have been partly because much of the time I was squinting, and wondering what this charming troupe might have looked like in a more flattering setting.

More in *Dance*

Share:      

The Annenberg audience loved Larry Keigwin's pop-oriented dance troupe. I, on the other hand, found the presentation deeply flawed. Atrocious lighting didn't help.

WHAT, WHEN, WHERE

Keigwin + Company. December 21-23, 2013 at Annenberg Center, 3680 Walnut St. (215) 898.3910 or www.annenbergcenter.org.

ABOUT GARY L. DAY



Gary L. Day is a produced playwright who lives in Center City Philadelphia.

ALSO OF INTEREST

'Thor: The Dark World'

For 50 years, Marvel Comics' Thor character has straddled the uneasy divide between the fantastic and the mundane. The latest installment of Thor's cinematic franchise is a mixed bag but does a decent job of balancing the two genres.

Pulitzer photos at National Constitution Center

The shared cultural memory produced by a great still photo can help to mold a nation's character and identity. But gone are the days when virtually the whole nation would see images captured by Associated Press photographers and printed in newspapers across the country.

"Ender's Game': To boycott or not?

What's the appropriate response to a movie based on a novel written by a homophobe? That's the question swirling around calls to boycott the coming release of *Ender's Game*.

How to save America from the Tea Party

When the Southern states seceded back in 1860, Lincoln should have let them go. Without the disruptive and destructive South, the rest of the Union would be more stable, more harmonious, and more productive.

COMMENT ON THIS ARTICLE



SUBMIT

GET IN TOUCH

BROAD STREET REVIEW

1315 Walnut Street Suite 904
Philadelphia, PA 19107
(215) 735-1455

STAY CONNECTED



✉ editor@broadstreetreview.com

Subscribe for weekly updates

SUBSCRIBE

BROAD STREET REVIEW

Welcome to *Broad Street Review*— an arts and culture website for Philadelphians with strong opinions.

Founded and edited by veteran journalist Dan Rottenberg, it functions not to promote a point of view but to promote the exchange of viewpoints. Fresh commentary is posted regularly in the performing and visual arts, as well as in other fields of interest to our eclectic group of professional and amateur writers.

© Copyright 2013. All Rights Reserved.