

DUMBO BOOKS OF BROOKLYN

(Brooklyn, NY, USA)

Tuesday, July 28, 2009

TUESDAY EVENING IN GLENDALE: Valerie Green/Dance Entropy at Forest Park

This evening we went out to Forest Park in Glendale, specifically to the Dry Harbor Playground on the park's northern edge of Myrtle Avenue, to see Dance Entropy, Valerie Green's Long Island City-based modern dance company perform a trio of their works, including the popular "Splash," for an audience of kids, parents, and unrelated oldsters like us. It was a terrific show, esthetically pleasing as well as fun for humans of all ages.

Her troupe's work is, however, accessible to kids; the most impressive thing we noticed this evening was that the dancers had the kids, by and large, in rapt attention, and that held true for probably ballet-mad little princesses of five or six or the tween boys who watched attentively from their bikes outside the gates on Myrtle Avenue. Walking around the crowd during the performance of the three pieces, we overheard a boy of maybe 10 say to his dad, "This wasn't made just for kids, was it?" He thought the movements were "weird" and "funny" but he intuited that behind the playfulness and enthusiastic energy, there was something more there, something he figured he was too young to "get." The reason this was such a great example of arts education and arts appreciation for kids was not just that it invited audience participation in each of the three works, but that it didn't talk down to children. Even the crowd-pleasing "Splash," done using buckets of water in all of its mundane uses (from swimming to crying), wasn't - um - watered down.

The first piece, "Dandia," Valerie explained, is based on an Indian dance with sticks. Her company held these sticks with orangish ribbons and used them to varied effects during the performance. The dancers whirl and move their feet and arms in a choreographed manner to the tune of the music with lots of drum beats. The kids got involved at the end of "Dandia" as they were given their own thin little sticks for them to dance with.

The next piece, "Chiquita Chiquita," was our favorite of three excellent works. It used wonderful props such as colorful straw hats, blankets, little plastic windmills, in imaginative ways.

The sprightly music was as finely tuned to the story of the dance as the performers' movements and gestures. The 18-minute work is playful and bold, entertaining for kids - who later were showcased as they came up (very enthusiastically, with ooh, ooh arms raised to participate) to discuss the various expected and unexpected ways the props were employed - but you didn't have to be a kid to appreciate both the cleverness and the complexity of the physical double entendres.

The last piece, "Splash," was pure magic. Since it was performed a couple of months ago at Harry's at Water Taxi Beach in Long Island City, presumably it works for adults, even inebriated ones, that it's not a kids' dance. Originally created for a drained outdoor pool with 14 dancers in brightly colored buckets filled with water, "Splash" worked really well in the outdoor setting of the playground; we liked seeing the foot and car traffic on Myrtle Avenue in the background. This dance is a structured improvisation to an exciting collage of music about water. We especially loved "Cry Me a River" and "Up a Lazy River" and how the dancers used them in the 11-minute performance. Afterwards, the kids, joined by some adults, came to the little buckets for their own movements, guided and not by the Dance Entropy Company. The kids and parents and the rest of us in the audience applauded the dancers and their interactive selves.

It really was a wonderful event, and if you can get a chance to see Valerie Green/Dance Entropy, you'll be as lucky as we were. We couldn't have made a better choice of an event for the early evening.

Article: Richard Grayson