

Bloomberg News

Dorfman Steps Lively

By Ruth Leon
June 2, 2005 (New York)

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At the Joyce, for just a week, is the lively, innovative and entirely committed David Dorfman Dance with two premieres and a favorite from a previous season.

Here is real dance excitement, a sense that something is happening and that it matters. In "Lightbulb Theory," a barefoot man (David Dorfman) in a flapping overcoat under an arrangement of light bulbs, dances as though his life depends on it, trying to talk to us about death. Eventually, eloquent though his body is, he needs words and he reads to us of his love for his father, who died recently.

As if to offset the melancholy of his loss, five young people, brilliant dancers every one, jump to a silly pop song and make us laugh. The thesis here, spoken by the dancers, is the conundrum of loss: Is it better for a light bulb -- or a person -- to go out suddenly or to flicker a warning first? "Lightbulb Theory" is entirely satisfying; eccentric as it is, it has a beginning, a middle and an end, and is self-explanatory even to the most committed modern dance-hater.

The piece "Approaching Some Calm" is a pas de deux for Dorfman and his wife, Lisa Race, a sequel to their previous "Approaching No Calm" and chronicling the differences to their lives since that 1994 piece. I find this, although remarkably well thought through and put together, a mite too personal for comfort.

The big work is the premiere of "Older Testaments," in which Dorfman's trademark falling, reaching and upside-downness is put to the service of Arabs and Jews, this time showing their commonalities rather than their differences.

Mournful Score

As with all of Dorfman's work, it is intelligent and full of insight, using body work to emphasize and extend what we can see and hear. It is, to my ears, sabotaged by Frank London's mournful and repetitious score, a gloomy doom-laden musical message where the dance itself offers hope or, at least, dialogue.

"Older Testaments" lacks the joy and accessibility of, say, "Lightbulb Theory," but it bears re-examination and more time spent in its company. I can't speak too highly of the young dancers in the troupe -- their deep familiarity with the material they are performing, their total commitment to looking silly, if that's what it takes, their trust in one another and themselves as human paintbrushes for Dorfman's ideas and their sheer technical dance skills.

David Dorfman Dance runs through June 5 at the Joyce Theater, Eighth Avenue at 19th Street.