

## Dance Troupe Lights Up the Stage

By [Caitlin Yuhas](#) Posted: 03/24/2008

This past weekend, New York's David Dorfman Dance company graced the stage of the Schwartz Center for Performing Arts. Led by artistic director David Dorfman, the company members and two guest artists appeared as part of the Emory Coca-Cola Artists in Residence program.

Founded in 1985, Dorfman's company is now one of the country's premier modern dance troupes. Its members perform extensively in North and South America, Great Britain and Europe. The collaboration between DDD and the Emory Dance Program began in the fall, when company members Molly Poerstel and Karl Rogers set a version of their repertory work, *underground*, on a group of Emory students. The Dorfman residency will end next weekend with the company's own performance of *underground* at the Rialto Center for the Arts. A select group of Atlanta residents, among them Emory students, will also dance in the piece.

Dorfman's movement style is beautifully unique: an aesthetic of risky, athletic steps combined with gestural phrases, long-limb extensions, free-flow in the torso and a sense of release into and out of the floor.

The fluidity and ever-changing weight of the movement is like a magic trick — the dancers sometimes appear out-of-control, when in fact they are very much aware of how their bodies are shifting.

There is something innately "real" about these performers. Their bodies are natural, their stage presence is organic — as a group, they are more awe-inspiring than intimidating.

DDD opened its concert at Emory with *Lightbulb Theory*, an act-long piece set to live piano accompaniment that Dorfman created during and after the last months of his father's life.

The first half of the work is a solo, performed by Dorfman himself. Hanging center-stage from the ceiling is a cluster of illuminated light bulbs. Dorfman reaches through the space below, tossing his body in all directions and occasionally playing peek-a-boo with the crowd. His soft smile and oversized black coat give him the appearance of a child playing "grown-up."

By the end of the solo, the movement has become more vigorous, more desperate. After completing his last set of steps, Dorfman crosses to a downstage corner, pulls out a black binder and recites an excerpt from the eulogy he wrote for his father's funeral.

As the lights dim, he walks back to center stage and tugs on one of the light bulbs. They instantly release from one another and begin swaying, now spread out, across the stage.

*Lightbulb Theory* continues with a quartet, while Dorfman watches from a seated position in the corner. Four dancers shift between energetic movements punctuated by vocal outbursts — "Woo!" being the most common — and slower, broken-down phrases.

A short solo by guest artist Jennifer Nugent is one of the most striking moments in the piece. To a sparse piano rendition of "Moon River," she glides across the floor with high extensions and impressive balance — her limbs are like water. At one point, the quartet approaches the audience to explain the "lightbulb theory": an idea that, like those about to die, bulbs either flicker before going out or lose their light without warning.

The concert's second act began with another repertory work, *approaching some calm*. Dorfman performed this duet with his wife, Lisa Race, a guest artist and former DDD company member.

The work uses effortless lifts and youthful, often humorous movement phrases as representations of the pair's relationship.

The two performers roll on the floor together, take turns dancing for and observing one another, and pinch each other's ears with the affection of a loving couple.

The final piece of the evening, a work-in-progress titled *Disavowal*, touches on the complexity of attachment — specifically, of drawing something in and later releasing it, be it a person, a place or an idea.

In an act of exposure, the piece opens with company members in their underwear. Instead of remaining onstage, the dancers wade through audience members and tie them together with yarn. Similar crowd participation resurfaces later.

Out of the three presented pieces, the movement in *Disavowal* is easily the most intense. After trading their skivvies for slate gray shirts and pants, the dancers charge through large group sequences and partnering sections, intermittently shouting and singing words of displeasure.

As is the case with most David Dorfman Dance works, the groundbreaking off-kilter/on-kilter movement is definitely present — but this time, with a hard-edged, somewhat disturbing theme unlike anything the company has done before.