

REVIEW

Fearless spins explore a maturing relationship

DAVID DORFMAN DANCE. Choreography by Dorfman, through Sunday at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Ave. at 19th Street, Manhattan. Tickets \$38. Call 212-242-0800 or visit www.joyce.org. Seen Tuesday.

BY SUSAN REITER

Robust eccentricity and earthy humanism coexist harmoniously in David Dorfman's ingenious works, which entertain and provoke — and sometimes puzzle. He has the whimsical audacity to set his dancers gyrating goofily to a Herman's Hermits song, but also belief in dance's capacity to explore issues such as death and religious confrontation.

His current program at the Joyce, marking his company's 20th anniversary, is a feast of juicy, quirky movement. The occasion did not prompt Dorfman to present a retrospective, but rather, to do two world premieres and a revision of a 2004 piece.

The new duet "approaching some calm," which he dances with his wife, Lisa Race, is, in its way, a look back. A companion piece (or perhaps sequel) to a duet they performed a decade ago, called "approaching no calm," it explores the trust and humor of a mature relationship through risky partnering moves blended with gestures of intimacy.

Race is a lean, powerful marvel of a dancer, whose forthrightness contrasts wonderfully with Dorfman's compact feistiness. When she jumps onto his shoulder, flops forward and holds herself outstretched as he spins fearlessly, she becomes a bold, beautiful bird in flight. Guy Klucevsek provides an off-beat accordion score through which

snippets of Burt Bacharach tunes bubble (including "Wives and Lovers").

Terrific live music is also a highlight of "Older Testaments." The brass-dominated score by Frank London (of the Klezmatics) is performed by a take-no-prisoners band featuring the composer. It meanders through vibrant, rhythmic sections but occasionally grows funereal.

The three men and three women seem stranded at first amid an array of books — piled into tall towers, strewn across the floor, one hanging overhead with its

pages spilling open. The costuming and text allude to the Bible, although the short spoken sequence has a juvenile tone. A Plexiglas cubicle serves as a trap and a refuge as the dancers pair off for rough-edged duets.

You're never sure exactly where the piece is headed. Layers of clothing are peeled off until, at the end, all six huddle naked inside the cubicle, trapped, although there are no walls on two sides. For a moment, they seem to be returning to the idyllic innocence of Eden, but the final image of their claustrophobic helplessness evokes victims in a gas chamber.

Perhaps "Older Testaments" will acquire stronger



PHOTO BY STAR REESE

The David Dorfman dancers perform "Lightbulb Theory" at the Joyce Theater.

focus with time, just as the alternately giddy and poignant "Lightbulb Theory" has in the year since it premiered. In his opening solo, Dorfman is a shaggy vaudevillian. Wearing loose clothes including a floppy open coat, he conjures up an era of more innocent performing but also radiates private delight. When five wonderfully spontaneous, intrepid performers then spin variations on his movement, they embody a rich range, from rambunctious playfulness to hostile confrontation to wistful isolation.

Susan Reiter is a freelance writer.