

## Legwork: Walking the beat at ADF

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### David Dorfman "underground" review

By Orla Swift  
Staff writer  
Durham

It's easy to see why a choreographer would be inclined to explore Chicago's tumultuous Days of Rage.

The Weather Underground's anarchic 1969 revolt in Chicago — when the Chicago 7 were being tried for allegedly inciting riots during the Democratic National Convention the previous year — was one of our country's most dramatic chapters, a cauldron of combat, terror, choreographed destruction and chaos.

But the most brutal segments of Chicago native David Dorfman's "underground" are not about the anarchists of yesteryear. They are about you and me.

The new evening-length dance, which had its world premiere Monday at American Dance Festival, forces its viewers to contemplate their own value systems. What is worth fighting for? What would you die for? Have you ever killed anything? In a violent world, can we fight for peace?

Dorfman integrates these questions and more throughout his 50-minute, intermissionless drama, which features Dorfman and 10 company dancers, and — in keeping with Dorfman's commitment to community involvement — 23 local guest performers.

Dorfman weaves his trademark wit into his sober theme. And his penchant for multi-disciplinary collaborations serves the piece especially well.

Dancers speak to the audience and to each other. Multi-media designer Jacob Pinholster's evocative collage of text, photos and documentary film footage is ever changing, projected sometimes at breakneck speed onto Cameron Anderson's artistic backdrop. And songs such as Jim Steinman's 1990s Meatloaf hit, "I'd Do Anything for Love, (But I Won't Do That)" take on renewed meaning.

"Underground" is a daring venture in post-9/11 America, when many U.S. residents are appalled at the mere suggestion that terrorists might have logical — albeit debatable — arguments in support of their destructive choices. Raise the issue and you risk being labeled unpatriotic, heartless or a terrorist sympathizer.

But when one of Dorfman's dancers suggests a situation in which she could save several people by killing one, and then multiplies it out to the hundreds and thousands, it's impossible not to make the connection between 1969s Chicago and, say, 2006 Iraq. And then it's up to each of us to discern where we draw the line between warmongers and anarchists.

If this sounds preachy or academic, it's not. You don't need to know about the Weather Underground's history before you go, and you may not know much more about it when you leave.

Even ignoring the politics, "underground" is a jaw-dropping spectacle. The crowd scenes are intricate and chilling. The physical exploration of group psychology is fascinating. The energy is supercharged throughout. The recurring movements and gestures — beginning with Dorfman performing solo as the audience files in — speak volumes by night's end. And Dorfman has a rare gift for recognizing the tension that can be mined from silence, stillness, or an urgent whisper.

By contrast, his overarching themes in the spoken word scenes were heavy-handed in spots. And "underground" could use more restraint in the humorous sections— especially the penultimate scene, when a group of young adults come upon a neglected monument to an activist and puzzle aloud over what it might signify. The scene came off like a school drama club improv game, and it was a disservice to the artistry that preceded it and the bittersweet resolution that followed.

Staff writer Orla Swift can be reached at 829-4764