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# The Arts

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## DANCE REVIEW

### Nothing Less Than Life or Death

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By JENNIFER DUNNING

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One of the great pleasures of watching dance in New York over the past decade or so has been seeing the growth of David Dorfman from accomplished to inspired modern-dance choreographer. The two new pieces Mr. Dorfman and his superb performers presented on Sunday afternoon at the Duke on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, produced by the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y, had strong fresh things to say about some of the most complicated yet fundamental human predicaments, in handsome, urgent movement abstract enough for the most extreme dance purists.

“Lightbulb Theory,” set to a haunting piano score by Michael Wall, took on nothing less than life and death. Mr. Dorfman, looking like a magician in his flapping overcoat, began the piece with a quietly gutsy solo with words that addressed a death, possibly that of his father. He opened a door at the back and out came four dancers (Paul Matteson, Heather McArdle, Jennifer Nugent and Joseph Poulson).

Is a light bulb better if it flickers out or suddenly goes dark: the performers asked as they were swept across the stage in seismic physical and emotional storms. Yet they were playful with one another. Real time and stage life coexisted, each adding vivid intensity to the other.

The title of the other piece—“Impending Joy”—says it all. Someone was always painfully isolated from the others in a quartet for storm-tossed rag dolls that drew on the dancers’ impressively subtle acting skills.

The ends of both pieces would have been gimmicky in any other hands. In “Impending Joy,” the dancers pulled from a wire tangle wooden slats on which audience members had written the completion of the phrase, “This is where.” Joy hovered, but beyond a far horizon. Meanwhile there was life to be danced.

Josh Epstein designed the quietly evocative lighting.