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'Dancing on the Ceiling' is a Fabulous Protest by Women of Stature

BY JOHN SCHNEIDER OCTOBER 25, 2017 10:32 AM

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Years ago, when the internationally acclaimed dancer, choreographer, scholar and teacher Simone Ferro agreed to chair UW-Milwaukee's dance program, she would sometimes lie on the studio floor after the students had gone to feel the energy of the youngsters whose hope for lives in art gave meaning to her new desk job. Last weekend, Ferro herself danced again, filling the studio theater with mature artistry in an unforgettable, quite probably historic concert of solos by six women in their fifth and sixth decades of life.

Dancing on the Ceiling, conceived and produced by Ferro, also included solos by Milwaukee's Debra Loewen, Madison's Li Chiao-Ping, Pittsburgh's Beth Corning, Charlotte Adams of the University of Iowa and Sara Hook of the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign. All have significant international credits and enormous stage presence. Milwaukee is the second stop on a planned national tour.

To quiet traffic sounds in quiet light, Ferro's heart-driven solo was composed by one of those former aspiring UWM students, Mauriah Kraker, who became a leading member of Loewen's Wild Space Dance Company and now studies with Hook toward a masters in fine art. An explorer and traveler, Ferro seemed to carefully intuit her way across some new ground to a next stage of life, perhaps.

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strands fall and explained the formula as a “fuzziness” regarding place and behavior. Then she danced, beautifully, a full range of movement possibilities, and I saw in her the great women of modern dance. She was eventually joined by sax virtuoso David Collins, a longtime collaborator whose presence underlined her own dance history.

Through virtuosic clowning, Corning showed us generations of her family—voluble, fragile and vividly alive around a dinner table. We also saw her loss; these folks are gone. We saw her dead, too; the tablecloth became her shroud. Then, no, she’s vibrantly alive, and they are living in her.

Hook became a woman trying to be everything required of a woman and an artist until doing so became too damaging. With amazing strength and flexibility, Li took us from astonishment to astonishment against her recorded voice reciting an encyclopedic list of words and imperatives starting with “be.” Adams danced naked on the rim of a bathtub, her middle-aged body lithe and graceful. She was glamorous, self-possessed, funny, natural, enjoying the time and, it seemed, needing no more. Not just dancers but all older women, Ferro said afterwards, are made invisible. This show is a fabulous protest.

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Mauriah Kraker

John Schneider

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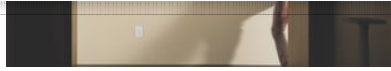
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