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UNFOLD | 7 perspectives

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UNFOLD | 7 PERSPECTIVES



Louis-Elyan Martin, Myriam Arseneault | @ Sylvie-Ann Paré

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"Unfold | 7 Perspectives"

FTA Review: Everything comes undone in the thunderous "Unfold | 7 Perspectives"

2019 FESTIVAL TRANSAMÉRIQUES COVERAGE

May 31, 2019 Andrew Sawyer



(Photo Credit: John Londono)

Directed and choreographed by Daniele Desnoyers and produced by Carré des Lombes, "**Unfold | 7 Perspectives**" is an hour long dance performance presented in the cavernous space of Édifice Wilder – Espace danse Studio-Théâtre des Grands Ballets as part of the 13th Festival TransAmériques.

As the title implies, there are seven dancers onstage for the majority of the performance – at times, one, two, or six will stand on the sidelines and watch. Regardless, they remain part of the performance – their bodies delicately attuned with the music and rhythms created by Ben Shemie along with Benoit Chaignon, sound engineer. With lighting direction by Hubert Leduc-Villeneuve, "Unfold | 7 Perspectives" slowly unravels itself into a powerful exploration of humanity and identity.



(Photo Credit: John Londono)

The dancers are moving before the audience is settled, even before the house lights have come down. The stage is still dark. It's hard to see them, but they're there – crawling, slowly, along two parallel rectangular raised platforms, a foot off the ground with a foot of space between them. The audience is beginning to notice and quiets down, attentive, as the lights come down too.

A small screen welcomes the audience, ticker tape style, and advises: “Mind the gap”. From here the show kicks into gear, though it starts slow. The dancers continue to parade down the two platforms arranged like catwalks, one by one, sometimes coming into contact but mostly in their own worlds. Their movements are incredibly restrained, slug-like, with goopy precision. The lighting is very dim, one can only make out their faces when they pose, briefly, on the ends of the platforms right before the audience. Then they leave – stage right or left, or behind the catwalks, barely visible. But their shapes are still there, and we see them take off their shirts, put on a pair of pants, put on a dress, take off a skirt. With seven dancers it’s hard to keep track and i’m surprised by the appearance of a dancer’s head, popping out from underneath the catwalks. The music has been as slow as the movement, a low, subtle reverberation with occasional skids of rhythm kicking in for a moment before disappearing as quickly as the dancers. An atmosphere is struck, one of intense claustrophobia, of an echo chamber. Of a bomb about to go off.

Fifteen minutes in and the music starts to pick up, along with my heartbeat. Suddenly the bass is so loud the whole theatre is rumbling and the dancers are running and sliding down the catwalks, as if cut loose. The central tension of the piece emerges – tension itself – and its unfurling into release, tension, release. The titular seven perspectives begin to unfold in front of us. Where before each was indistinct, unremarkable in appearance, suddenly each now has a signature colour and style designed by Angelo Barsetti. Something about being unrestrained gives them life.



(Photo Credit: Sylvie Ann Paré)

Now the dancers are pulling the catwalks apart, rearranging the eight smaller platforms into a square. The lighting grid twenty feet above them is being pulled up higher and higher, revealing the enormity of the space they are now filling with their bodies. The rhythms continue to build into crescendos before devolving into stutters just as quickly, matching the dancers. They are squirming around each other, movements becoming longer and more languid, as if they are trying to escape their own bodies.

The platforms are pushed entirely to the sides and the dancers occupy the center, swirling around each other, taking cues from one another as to how to move and then running with it. It's a dance of identity, of trying things on, learning from one another, and returning to a more neutral place. "Mind the gap" refers to this space where we can get lost, a place without boundaries but where we have room to unfold and develop our perspective. Kudos to the whole team for an enervating show, and to the dancers especially for sharing such a powerful performance.

The 13th Annual Festival TransAmériques presents

UNFOLD | 7 PERSPECTIVES
DANIÈLE DESNOYERS

Performances
May 30 + 31 + June 1 @ 7pm
Duration: 1 h 20 m

Venue
Édifice Wilder – Espace danse
1435 Rue de Bleury

Box Office
514 844 3822 / 1 866 984 3822
www.fta.ca



A16 QUEBEC THE GLOBE AND MAIL | SATURDAY, JUNE 1, 2019

Desnoyers's exciting dance piece deserves more than three shows

ROBERT EVERETT-GREEN

DANCE REVIEW

Unfold 1: 7 Perspectives
GRANDS BALLETS STUDIO THEATRE IN MONTREAL

Directed by Danièle Desnoyers
Featuring Myriam Arseneault, Paige Culley, Jean-Benoit Labrecque-Gilbert, Louis-Elyan Martin, Milan Panet-Gigon, Nicolas Patry and Brontë Poiré-Prest

Constraint can be a great spur for experimentation. During much of her latest creation, Montreal choreographer Danièle Desnoyers obliges her seven dancers to move in contact with 10 knee-high black tables, configured in different ways by the choreographer and set designer Geneviève Lizotte.

At the start of this hour-long show, the tables are arrayed into two parallel ramps running toward the audience, with just enough space to walk between. The dancers crawl or slink along the ramps, torsos often leaning out sideways or even backward. "Mind the gap" flashes across a screen, inviting us to think metaphorically when someone crosses over the gap, or slips down into it, as if drowning.

The scene is dimly lit from a lighting rig lowered to about the height of a normal ceiling. Ben Shemie's rumbling ambient music shifts at the same slow pace as the dancers' movements. The three women and four men change costumes in the shadows before each pass along the ramps, like models on a catwalk. That playful association seems unavoidable when two women sidle down the ramps in full-length satin gowns. Not many costume designers for contemporary dance work from as large a wardrobe as Angelo Barsetti does here.

The unstable leaning postures persist as dancers begin to engage more with each other. True to Ms. Desnoyers's title, the performers unfold the various implications of leaning into another's body – for shelter or intimacy, to show dependency or dominance. A front-facing duet for two women, lit this time from the back of the theatre, looks both sensual and aloof; their wide-legged movements are lithe but also mechanical at times. The dancers pull the tables apart, the lighting rig rises and the music intensifies. The tables reconfigure into a rectangle, with the dancers speeding around the edges in both directions.

The tables break apart again, slowly, like tectonic plates splitting the Earth, and a strange dance party breaks out in the empty centre of the space. The performers take turns doing a spasmodic movement, as if racked with anxiety at the loss of something solid to lean against. That loss eventually seems like an emancipation, via a pas de deux that revels in the physical lyricism that surfaced in a halting way throughout the piece.

Unfold 1: 7 Perspectives is packed with material; when it was over, I could hardly believe the whole work really lasted only an hour. There's a compelling logic to Ms. Desnoyers's choreography, but it can also be excitingly ragged and wild.

Gonzalo Soldi and Hub Studio light the work in dramatic ways, often from a single direction. Their stark and powerful approach makes the space feel as dynamic as the choreography. Mr. Shemie's varied electronic soundtrack usually matches the intensity of the dance, but sometimes overpowers it. Music, like movement, occupies space, and when the sound becomes very loud and aggressive, there seems little room for anything else.

Unfold 1: 7 Perspectives is a production of Carré des Lombes, the company Ms. Desnoyers founded in 1989. Thirty years is a long time in contemporary dance and Ms. Desnoyers is still exploring. She had a fantastic ensemble to work with: Myriam Arseneault, Paige Culley, Jean-Benoit Labrecque-Gilbert, Louis-Elyan Martin, Milan Panet-Gigon, Nicolas Patry and Brontë Poiré-Prest. Three performances, albeit within the frame of Festival TransAmériques, are not enough for this powerful new piece.

Unfold 1: 7 Perspectives runs until June 1, 2019