Vertigo Dance Company brings breathtakingly beautiful telling of dance, ecology, and art to PS21

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The sound of a shovel digging into the earth, soil being slung, repeat, repeat, repeat until the audience quieted. A lone dancer began to move with such fluidly one might think she is made of water, with an ebb and flow, a gentle wave contrasting a rip current. She was not alone for long though, when a second dancer began slowly walking across the front of the stage, pouring soil onto the floor in a purposeful, symbolic straight line from stage right to stage left, defining the lines of this newly created world into which the audience was seemingly a voyeur, yet very much a part of the experience in “One. One & One” on Thursday, July 28 at Performance Spaces for the 21st Century in Chatham, N.Y.

In a sacred, ritual-esque pattern, several male dancers lifted the female soloist in a series of lifts across the stage, finishing in a crucifix-like position before she was lowered to the ground. There, the men began to braid her hair as she...
traveled across the stage diagonally, the men creating a choreography of hair behind her as she moved.

At a second interval, the same dancer with the soil pail began creating a second line of soil slightly further upstage, away from the audience. Almost imperceptibly, the stage was soon full with the entire company of dancers, moving about with such fluid movement, they appeared to never be still for more than a moment. After several more rows of soil were delicately poured onto the stage, the tension of the audience wondering “what happens to the soil now?” was tangible.

As the audience had been waiting for soil to be disturbed, the dancers finally began to smear the soil as they rond de jambed their way downstage toward the audience, building more and more suspense as the soil began to chaotically cover the entire stage, leading into a moment reminiscent of a battle scene. In this cacophony of movement, the dancers tossed themselves at each other in a series of partnered lifts, jumps, and turns that moved so quickly the eye had difficulty catching each one.

Each and every dancer’s movements appeared to be so effortless, it was as if their muscles were merely along for the ride in their liquid-like exploration of releasing and flowing through every movement; an illusion of course, as their strength, control, and balance was beautifully evident with their emotive, stunning presence on stage.

As the dancers moved through the soil, becoming more and more covered in soil stains, it became clear that the dancers were of the earth—a brilliant reminder that we, as humans, are also of the earth. Regardless of how long the dancers in “One. One & One” delayed their contact with it, the earth caught up to them and covered them in soil. It was a reminder that we must work with the earth, not in separation from it...or the negative consequences of earth’s ecology will be far more detrimental than stained clothing.
The piece concluded with an air of reverence. The dancers moved their arms in unison like birds, as if they were gently flying away to something, or somewhere, else. The exuberant audience roared with applause and a lengthy standing ovation. The company took at least half a dozen bows before exiting, despite the continued applause and cheers, to allow the Q&A to begin.

In the post-performance Q&A with PS21’s Executive and Artistic Director Elena V. Siyanko and Vertigo Dance Company’s Artistic Director Noa Wertheim, Wertheim elaborated on the ecological art village that Vertigo Dance Company is part of and how this ecological art village is serving their home community in Israel, as well as the meaning and intention of the piece’s title, “One. One & One.”

Vertigo Dance Company’s ecological art village was started in 1992 to do social, communal, and artistic work in the community of the Kibbutz Netiv Halamed-Heh in the Elah Valley of Israel. The company dancers support the mission of this village, which informs their work and most certainly informs the work of Artistic Director Noa Wertheim. Wertheim explained that the movement vocabulary of Vertigo Dance Company utilizes gravity, counter balance, martial arts, contact improvisation, the relationship of listening between dancers, and the sensations of the four elements (water, wind, earth, and fire). All these qualities are present in daily life and, therefore, are present in the choreography of the company.

Additionally, Wertheim shared that the stage setting, which included a black backdrop and two long white benches that were on each side of the stage, was intended to be reminiscent of a house, furthering the concept of the soil on the stage as the earth in this structural narrative. According to Wertheim, the title, “One. One & One,” suggests a holiness and separation, to mean that people are very similar, but also very unique, especially with the gifts we each have to give in our lives.

The choreographic telling of dance, ecology, and art in “One. One & One” was breathtakingly beautiful and poignantly relevant, especially on the grounds of PS21, which is in the beginning stages of developing an ecological art village.