

ARTS+CULTURE

Luminario Ballet's Season Five Repertoire Is A Bold Attempt

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Christina Campodonico | September 22, 2014 | 4:41 p.m. PDT

Contributor

A revolving globe caught my eye. A projection of a glowing earth illuminated the stage's backdrop as a single dancer in a white unitard stretched her body forward into an elegant flat back.

This adroit solo by Emilie Livingston initiated six movements, collectively titled "Trails." The work-in-progress featured additional satellite imagery from NASA and body-mapping video projections by Paul Ackerman. A slideshow of giant, rainbow weather patterns, pulsing water ripples and geographic maps of the American Southwest created a luminous scenery for the dancers and aerialists.

Meanwhile, the strains of Philip Glass's "Mishima," performed by the New Valley Symphony Orchestra, rose with urgency.

As I watched the dancers execute technically flawless steps, the beauty of their movements seemed strangely disconnected from the foreboding images playing overhead.

The dancers' graceful arabesque lines and dainty bourées clashed with the enlarged diagrams of jagged earthquake fault lines and volcanic hot zones. It created a strange type of tension, as if the dancers were unaware, oblivious and indifferent to the imminent dangers ahead. This left me feeling as if their movements were paltry in comparison to the enormity of the theatre-size images and the global scale of climate change. Then again, I reflected, my obsession with seeing a Led Zeppelin inspired aerial ballet suddenly seemed trivial in comparison to the incredible risks these artists were taking—dangling from lyra hoops and accomplishing fantastic feats amidst a chaotic light show.

It will take much more than technical mastery and flashy images to give adequate voice to a problem as massive as climate change. But I commend Luminario Ballet for its bold attempt to use dance as a platform for responding to this pressing environmental concern.

"Dancers rarely get a chance to speak," said the company's managing and artistic director Judith FLEX Helle. "We just get up on stage and

we move without speaking, so I felt that if we talked about [climate change] through our movement that it would get the audience to talk about it.”

The inclusion of “Trails” in Luminario’s repertoire is not only ambitious, but it is also extremely timely as New York comes off Sunday’s [Climate March](#) and the UN convenes the [2014 Climate Summit](#) on Tuesday. While Luminario Ballet’s programming lacked cohesion, “Trails” showed the company’s sensitivity to the world beyond ballet and its daring capacity to experiment imaginatively with new technology.

“Discoveries in science happen when a curious person goes exploring and dance is also a creative path, where a curious person is also exploring,” said Helle.

Going to Luminario Ballet reminded me of the risk inherent in exploring any uncharted territory. I applaud them for their curiosity, acrobatic prowess and readiness to investigate the areas between art and science.