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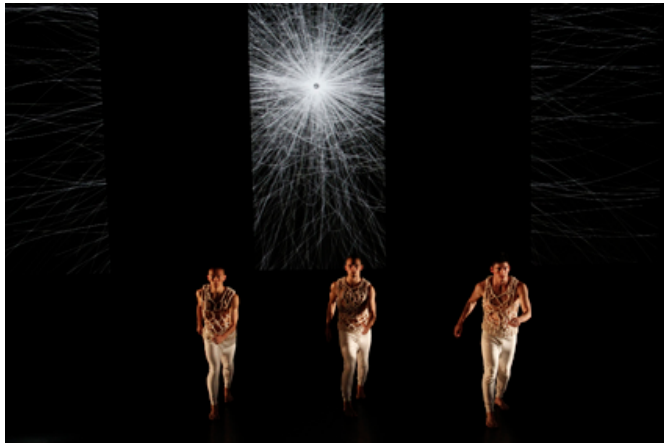
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Inside the body, behind the mask

Jessica Sabatini: Stephanie Lake, Eleanor Bauer




Aorta, Chunky Move
photo Jeff Busby

To turn the body inside out and reveal its systems one by one is the purpose of the science of anatomy. AORTA, the final work of 2013 by choreographer Stephanie Lake, also seeks to show the world beneath our skin, but as kinetic poetry. It is an ambitious vision, deepening the truth that dance reflects to us a felt sense of the body, and integrating design elements to produce a multi-layered work of abstract grace.

In a string of changing atmospheres, AORTA sees dancers Josh Mu, James Pham and James Batchelor swell and ripple like blood in the veins, vibrate like nerves, mutter and quibble in a cerebral section, then leap and scream with a primal pulse, and sometimes unite their hands and fingers to produce a thatch of wriggling villi. Their ensemble work depicts complex relationships and often microscopic (here magnified) chain reactions: sometimes soft and cascading, sometimes mechanical and angular. This vocabulary seems drawn from both experience and scientific knowledge: the spasm of a muscle we recognise at a glance, but the firing of a neural pathway is quite another thing, far more elusive.

Lake's intricate visual poetry is a strength and her dancers are in consummate form to deliver a steady and mesmerising stream of it (Phan in particular undulating without a sound, like quicksilver escaping). Enriching this is a soundscape from Robin Fox of mostly electronic but sometimes organic textures (with trickling water and slippery, ultrasonic moments). Integral, too, is projection design by Rhian Hinkley: on three backdrop screens laser-like images wax and wane—sizzling asterisks and streaming particles, fractals that spread themselves like bonded molecules, interiors opened out.

Conjuring that which is beyond our sight, and yet resides within our deepest biology, AORTA is a complex and beautiful work that, like all living things, amounts to more than the sum of its interconnected parts.



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