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CAROLYN DORFMAN DANCE COMPANY MIAMI BEACH DANCE FESTIVAL

By Nancy Wozny

Dance is supposed to touch the deep parts of our being. With Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company (CDDC) doing the dancing you can plan to leave moved and then some. Dorfman creates work from the themes she finds important, most notably her Jewish background, and the stories from her family's past as Holocaust survivors. As part of the Miami Beach Dance Festival, the CDDC presented a quartet of works that showed off the troupes range, depth, and technical finesse.

Echad, Dorfman's meditation on the delicate balance between the individual and the community, featured a gigantic stainless steel wheel. Dorfman sets up considerable tension in the opening section, stirring the air in circular formations. With several false approaches to the wheel in teasing gestures, the dancers finally jump on the wheel. But with such a sustained prelude, it's as if the wheel took charge and scooped all of them up in its cogs. The culmination is a stunning moment of triumph and balance. Dorfman's dance is rich with a lush movement vocabulary, that, although borrowing from classic modern dance traditions, is also distinctly her own. Jon Zimmerman's arresting solo captures the struggle between controlling and being controlled by an outside force.

Love Suite Love, set to the wistful tunes of Pasty Cline, captures Dorfman in a lighter mood. Exploring the sultry tenor of Cline's songs more than their word-for-word content, Dorfman dwells in the longing, missed chances, risk-taking aspects of a love relationship. Simple props such as pillows and chairs ground the work in familiar settings. The songs maybe slow and full of sustained emotion but the dance is athletic and rich with intricate partnering.

Cat's Cradle, set to and Bente Kahan and Ilse Weber's cabaret songs sung by Kahan, explores life in Theresianstadt, a ghetto that held over 80,000 Jews before they were sent to concentration camps under the Nazi regime (Theresianstadt was a destination for artists and intellectuals.) The dancers spool and unspool balls of yarn as a connecting thread and a visual metaphor. Dorfman pares down here as simple torso circles and spins weave the tale of a group of women on the brink of destruction. Towards the end a dancer drags on a wagon piled with bodies. The women weave their yarn through the dead as if to take their memories with them. It's an emotionally wrenching moment yet poignant in its directness. Sean Perry's lighting conveys a sense of place, and Katherine Winter's simple dresses look authentic. Dorfman's unfussy dance succeeds.

Dorfman switches back to a more lyrical mood in Pastorale Pause. Jon Whelan's vibrant Celtic jigs make for a lively sound score to match the jubilant vibe. A ground-level rotating disk makes for a 360 degree approach and amplifies of the sculptural feel of the dance. The fine dancers included Zimmerman, Kyla Barkin, Joan Chiang, Jacqueline Dumas, Wendee Rogerson, Aaron Selissen, David Shen, Sarah Wagner, Kate Hirstein, and Mark Taylor.