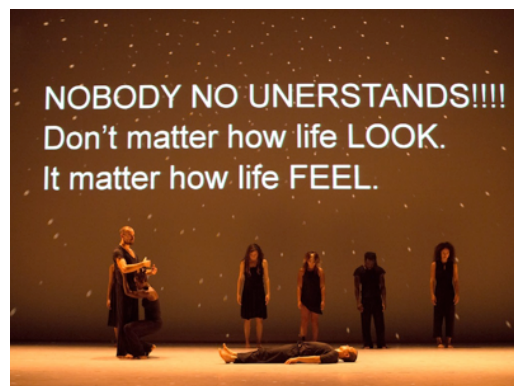


LEHIGH VALLEY
DANCE EXCHANGE
LVDE

David Roussève-REALITY

Stardust

Tuesday, February 11, 2014
Williams Center for the Arts
By Sarah Carlson



Every once and a while a show comes along that is so well timed, so exquisitely crafted, and so masterfully delivered that there is only awe in its wake. David Roussève has been telling stories with his multi-media production company REALITY for over 20 years and his persistence has paid off. His searingly poignant “Stardust” performed at The Williams Center this past Tuesday night provided salient commentary on the progress and pitfalls of life in the 21st century.

Roussève’s productions are multi-layered and often blend linear narrative with dance, video and music. Here, the story arc is driven by a series of tweets by a black teenage homosexual struggling to find love. The tweets are projected on a screen above and behind the dancing. Abbreviations and gangsta street lingo make for comical moments but also serve to situate the

character. Although we never learn his name, his tweets are clearly directed towards “us”– whom he’s found by simply sending his tweets to a random, unknown # - or as he quips, “off into internet land”. Meanwhile, a chorus of dancers faces the audience engaging in gestures and body language that illustrate the emotion behind the tweets.

The direct nature of this structure creates an immediate bond between the main character & the audience. The tweets reveal a boy struggling with identity and yearning for love and acceptance in a harsh, violent world. Very quickly, Roussève transforms the tweet from a superficial forum for quick chatter to a medium for profound self-revelation. Initially, the movement is minimal and the marriage between projected text & live dance is the best I’ve seen.



Once the dancing becomes more intricate, it becomes somewhat harder to absorb the drama of both the tweets and the onstage movement.



Meanwhile, Roussève’s multi-racial cast can be seen moving with a grounded yet romantic flow. Hands pound on hearts and heads arch backward as if beseeching the heavens. The chorus appears alternately as a collective of individuals and the collective unconscious. At one point, one woman approaches another as if to share a secret, then (unexpectedly) utters an ear-piercing scream. The other woman shares the audience’s shock initially, only to be drawn into an exchange of screams that are blood curdling. They appear to scream into one another’s mouths, as if passing on or drawing out the very essence of desperation. The moment is thoroughly chilling.

Just when reading the tweets becomes a bit tiresome, the voice of Nat King Cole sweeps in with his classic recording of “When I Fall in Love”. The dreamy instrumentation and rich tenor of King Cole’s voice are a stark contrast to the harsh world of the tweeter. Several of Cole’s recordings pepper the action, each song meticulously woven into the fabric of the storyline. The lyrics of his songs have never been so refreshing and yet so rife with irony.

Unloved and marginalized, the main character’s suffering gets under our skin and moves us. We can’t help but share in his joys and sorrows and in the process reflect on the limits of tolerance around us. Roussève’s use of social media as the medium for his story telling is brilliant and captures the malaise of many 21st century youth. While technology has provided instantaneous connection, in some ways we are more alone than ever. Despite its heart-wrenching tone, “Stardust” manages to end with a ray of hope for a future where dreams can still come true.