

Meghan Keeney

Dance Performance: Hubbard Street Chicago Dance Company

In the second week of Hubbard Street Chicago Dance Company's residency at the Joyce Theater, dancers performed a program featuring three works choreographed by award-winning Canadian choreographer, Crystal Pite. Going into the show, I was nervous I wouldn't feel the full effect of the performance from my cheap too-close front-row seat. However, my worries subsided immediately as the first piece began and I saw the sweat drip off of the performers; the dancers' onstage vulnerability left me mesmerized.

Each piece of the night contributed to a central theme of different relationships: one of passionate love and heartbreak, one of extreme internal conflict, and one of attempted deviation from the mainstream crowd.

In the first piece, "Pictures of You Falling," dancers Craig Black Jr. and Ana Lopez move in response to a spoken-word poem, written by Pite, about a couple remembering the night they broke up. Repetition of phrases including "this is how you collapse" had the dancers throwing themselves repeatedly onto the floor, articulating every limb as Pite's words highlighted body parts ("knees," "back," "hand" etc). Beams of light stretched in patterns across the floor and played with the dancers as they interpreted Pite's words. Black's movement quality was gritty, rugged, yet stunning, whereas Lopez flowed across the stage in a fluid whirlwind. Their qualitative differences complemented each other on stage and led them to instantly share a sincere intimacy that undoubtedly left the audience misty-eyed.

Pite's male duet and second piece of the night, "The Other You," played with mirroring and self-manipulation. The forceful dancers, Michael Gross and Andrew Murdock, passed as twins onstage even down to their shaved heads. The duo relentlessly taunted each other with their movement. As the action intensified, the dancers ferociously (and literally) barked at each other—at one point both were yelling "don't tell me what to do"—up until Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata started ringing through the air and an overhead moonlight suddenly flooded the stage, conjuring up the image of dogs howling at the moon.

The industrious last number, "Grace Engine," involved the whole company of 15 dancers. Tensions built up as the group continuously turned a blind eye away from solo dancers silently crying out for help. Every phrase of meticulous movement proved each dancer's caliber of training. But even though this number involved the whole company, the previous duos had a stronger impact.