

## HEDWIG DANCES, AUDIENCE MEMBERS SIT BACK AND ENJOY

By Christopher Atamian



Jan Bartoszek's Hedwig Dances arrived in New York this week via Chicago, where the company is based, and Havana, where four of the six dancers apparently hail from. We're happy they did. Friday night at the Joyce Soho Hedwig presented three relatively short, lovely dances from three different choreographers: Bartoszek, Andrea Miller and Marianela Boan. If you know nothing about contemporary dance, this trio-and the dancers performing them-provides a good sampler mixing styles and rhythms while demonstrating a deep seriousness of purpose, a hieratic, almost devotional aura and an evident passion for their work throughout.

In Bartoszek's *Night Blooming Jasmine*, the six Hedwig dancers (Victor Alexander, Alitra Cartman, Justin Deschamps, Maray Gutierrez, Jessie Gutierrez and Michel Rodriguez) perform in summery cotton pants and shirts, moving around the stage with a lovely lightness

of being reminiscent at times of Buddhist monks praying, at others of Christ-like crucifixions, as they recreate the movements and activities of the night (nb:the jasmine releases its scent after dusk...) One wouldn't necessarily know that this is what the dance represents and it doesn't matter: the movement vocabulary is original, varied and simply elegant.

Andrea Miller's *Dust*, dedicated to her departed stepfather Jack, is ostensibly about mortality, loss and perhaps even trust. Michel "Chino" Rodriguez and Deschamps run in a circle, push and pull off and onto each other, sometimes covering each others' eyes as they bound forward, for the better part of eleven minutes. It's an abstract piece, reminiscent of early modern improvisational work. Set to Arvo Pärt's lovely and sad *Fratres* it hits just the right note. I have been watching Miller's work since her student days at Juilliard and at her own company Gallim Dance, and this is perhaps my favorite piece of hers to date: simple, unpretentious, and level-in a word, mature.

Marianela Boan who choreographed the final piece, *Stampede*, with original score by Christian Cherry also works with improvisation, letting her dancers innovate as they go. They negotiate space in and around yellow and black slashed crowd control ropes, moving them around the stage and changing their geometric configurations. The

piece begins with Maray Gutierrez slipping in and out, under and over the ropes that are arranged in a boxing ring formation, until the robust and very macho Victor Alexander picks her up and literally sweeps her off her feet. Some of the rope work is reminiscent of (rhythmic) gymnastics. As the dancers negotiate each other, the ropes



and imaginary crowd members, the dance becomes a metaphor for negotiating and overcoming life's abstract obstacles as well. It's a lovely piece and a lovely dance company.

Bartoszek held a Q & A after the Friday performance with her dancers. Both choreographer and performers displayed an infectious charm and good humor which counts for something, as well. We hope to see them at the Joyce again soon, next time in Chelsea...

*Photos of Hedwig Dances' "Night Blooming Jasmine", by Eileen Ryan.*

**Nota bene:** *Night Blooming Jasmine* received its New York Premiere on Friday, *Stampede* and *Dust* their World Premieres. Victor Alexander technically hails from Pinar del Rio, not La Havana. Marianela Boan is also Cubana!

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