

Book Review: BLACK MILK

Written by Douglas Wright,
photographs by John Savage
Craig Potton Publishing (2009)



If looking closely at dance is something you love to do, then *Black Milk* (the book) is something you will probably want to buy. The book offers 90 photographs by John Savage taken during the creative process, rehearsal and performance of Douglas Wright's *Black Milk* during 2006. Alongside the images are commentary and poetry by the choreographer as he reflects on the making of the work and the experience of seeing unsuspected aspects emerge through the photographs. And there is an essay by Leonard Wilcox which delves deeply into the contents, meanings and myriad connections of the work to art, society, history, and recent academic theory.

This remarkable publication is many things – part documentary record, part coffee table book, part meditation, part work of art. If you experienced the live performance, it allows extended contemplation of fleeting moments still dancing in one's memory, and makes evident contextual connections now fixed in time. Whether you experienced the performances or not, it helps to expand your understanding of the collective commitment required to create such a work, and the transformation engendered in the journey of the work from conception to reality.

The photographs range from crisp and clear to weirdly warped, from photojournalist realism to mysterious images enveloped in painterly chiaroscuro – a range every photographer encounters while attempting to capture dance images. In keeping that range intact it honours this particular photographer's own relationship to the photographic process – dance was a new subject for him and we see his understanding changing in the course of the project. We see him coming to terms with what the choreographer calls 'the alphabet of gesture', and to his credit there is no attempt to control the spectacular moment a la Lois Greenfield. In the studio shots, we see the collective focus required for the success of the project, and in his moving portraits we sense his admiration for the dancers who conjured this work from their bodies: Brian Carbee, Craig Bary, Sarah-Jayne Howard, Helaina Keeley, Alex Leonhartsberger, Claire O'Neil, Jessica Shipman, Tairora Royal, Kelly Nash, Guy Ryan.

Book designer Alan Deare employs different strategies in the five primary sections, with the non-performance sections intermixing image and text, oversized pull quotes, varying font sizes, black white and red text, and playing with the positioning and size of images on certain pages. The performance section however, is stabilized, with richly glowing images merging into the darkness of the stage behind, giving these images the particular weight and significance of high art.

The book was released in December 2009 by Craig Potton Publishing and has already been reprinted. It is available at bookstores or online.

By Raewyn Whyte

GRADUATION 09

New Zealand School of Dance
Te Whaea, Wellington
28 November

Each year the New Zealand School of Dance produces a vital, professional and thoroughly entertaining evening of dance. 2009's was no exception.

Two traditional classical works were featured - Pas de Quatre and the Pas De Trois from *Paquita*, Act One. Both were stylishly produced by Lidiya Klymenko and Yuriy Klymenko respectively. The former was pleasingly danced by all the cast, but the lack of characterisation of the four famous ballerinas depicted, lessened its impact.

Paquita was given a dashing performance by Haruka Tsuji, Anna Ishii and the dynamic Andre Santos, a dancer of charm and brio.

The newly commissioned *Haere*, choreographed by Cathy Livermore, proved a gentle, if somewhat bland work, which lacked



clarity of focus. It was however, strongly danced by all and beautifully lit by Paul O'Brien.

Love, an excerpt from Shona McCullagh's full-length *Quick*, was performed with fluid style and professionalism by Emmi Coupe and Florian Teatiu. The partnering of both dancers was exemplary, with the tiny Coupe effortlessly lifting the lanky Teatiu. The equal partnership of McCullagh's grandparents was beautifully conveyed.

X300, a dramatic work originally performed by Bangarra Aboriginal Dance Theatre, is based on the atomic tests in the 1950s on Maralinga Tjarutja traditional lands. Although performed with commitment by all the cast, it lacked subtlety and choreographic invention.

A definite highlight was the classical/contemporary pas de deux, *Crossed Fingers*, choreographed by Sarah Foster, and stunningly performed by Katherine Grange and Loughlan Prior. Grange possesses beautiful elasticity and refined placing. She should watch over-smiling – it is not necessary. We will be smiling watching her.

Prior is a most masculine dancer, and an able, sensitive partner. The match was heavenly.

All hail to Garry Trinder for commissioning Tane Mete and Tairora Royal's magnificent and aptly named, *He Taonga – A Gift*. Exemplarily performed by nine male dancers and lit with a painter's eye by O'Brien, it could have graced any stage. A moving tribute to the dancers themselves, this multi-layered work combined traditional and contemporary dance forms and suggested among other things, acceptance and racial equality.

Paul Taylor's buoyant *Airs* feeds not only the eyes, but also the spirit. It was staged by Richard Chen See, who drew outstanding ensemble performances from all the cast, with particularly fine work from Jana Castillo, Emma Coppersmith, Robbie Curtis and Florian Teatiu. The dancers performed with verve and abandon, and although more epaulement would have added extra spark, it was truly, another gift.

By Ann Hunt

INTERJECT, DISRUPT, VANISH

The University of Waikato,
Hamilton
21-25 September

Busy stairwells, concrete ramps, building entrances and foyers, lakeside boardwalks and picnic tables... These are all sites people frequent and accumulate following the regular rhythms of campus life. It is easy to pass through such sites, or for social activities to dominate, and the potential of these public places as performance sites remain unrecognised.

However, with an agenda to interject performance into these sites, Sue Cheesman and dancers disrupted the regular rhythms of the campus community and then vanished again. Reappearing in different locations over a week on the campus, the dancers startled, amused and engaged their unsuspecting audiences. Being in possession of a list of the dates and sites of performance, I deliberately attended these seemingly random disruptions, observing movement motifs and phrases that drew inspiration from the everyday behaviour of people at each site. A repertoire of each site was thus identifiable, as well as characteristic elements of Cheesman's choreography. Complex rhythmic steps and hops contrasted with recognisable pedestrian gestures and with simple actions of giving and receiving weight. As I arrived at each new site I began to recognise and accumulate repeating and developing motifs that linked the performances and provided a sense of unity to the choreography overall.

Alongside a grey concrete ramp, bodies hung limp from steel railings; functional site features contrasted with the organic softness of the dancers' bodies. Beneath an impressive architectural building entrance, dancers offered and supported other's weight, while the face of the building seemed to observe curiously. Against a background of lake and trees, dancers suddenly disrupted others as they broke into rapid position changes and jumps over benches. An internal foyer and stairwell echoed with the percussion of dancing steps rather than regular pedestrian footsteps, alluding perhaps to the multiple rhythms of campus life.