
REVIEW: "Spacetime Suite" by Katie Sopoci Drake at Dance Loft on 14

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by Chanel Smith

Colors of purple and blue flooded the stage as a quartet of dancers stood together among countless orbs of white light projected onto the floor. Already a galactic atmosphere was evoked.

On September 30th, 2016, Katie Sopoci Drake and dancers presented *Spacetime Suite* as part of the Dance Metro DC's 2016 Presentation Grant recipient program. It was a thrill to witness this performance that Katie Sopoci Drake described as "dance experiments in astrophysics and human dynamics."

I was a bit suspicious of the evening's theme of outer space and astrophysics conveyed by dance. Many times I've found these concepts too abstract to relate to as an audience member viewing dance. To my surprise the first thing that was presented were spatial orientation exercises for the audience. These were the same exercises given to the dancers Drake used in creating the movement for the piece. Different types of gazes were introduced to visualize your proximity to different landmarks. Drake also walked us through how the audience was oriented in relation to the cardinal directions North, South, East, and West. All these exercises were used to open our awareness and recognize our relation to the night's sky, its stars, and planets above. Drake continued to explain how the visualizations and images allowed her and dancers to access the more abstract ideas of space in a visceral embodied way.

Opening up the *Spacetime Suite* movement selection was the quartet of dancers Katie Harris Banks, Amanda Blythe, Keira Hart-Mendoza, and Erica Rebollar. Each dancer stood near each other in stillness revealing their differences of height, which gave reference to the levels of space they occupied for me as the viewer. As they began to move with a direct, yet soft, movement quality, they each moved outward from the center of the group in differing levels of space – some high, some low. The image I began to recognize was the iconic drawings of bodies moving within a geometric form drawn by Rudolf von Laban. Each dancer, committed to their own spatial pathway, moved as both individuals and as a group form. Then a striking motif began to form as they gathered back into the beginning group form and collapsed to the floor revealing the now empty space they once occupied.

Traveling through to the next section of movement was a solo dancer, Heather Doyle. The mood changed to a darker tone as the colors shifted to red and the music deepened in mysterious sounds and layered voices. Doyle traveled across the stage by sliding along the floor with her feet towards the audience. Her movement referenced a body walking down a staircase, but oriented diagonally and sideways across the dance floor. This became a fascinating motif that was also repeated later in the evening by the full cast of dancers. As the solo continued, Doyle came to standing in a wide lunge with her arms stretched to her sides extended as far as possible. Her gaze lifted upwards as if she was absorbing the entire space around her. "There were those," was repeated through voices in the background then changed into sounds of nature, possibly wind blowing or waves washing ashore.

The performance continued to seamlessly transition from one idea and movement section to another. The program indicated different images explored including three body problems, orbits, waves, tidal disruption, black holes, and fractals. Whether recognizable or not these images appeared to influence the movement quality of the dancers.

One section in particular that stuck with me was a duet danced by Katie Sopoci Drake and Sam Horning. The movement was quite different than previous sections. Both dancers, side by side, began jiving movement starting in their hips and traveling into sometimes the full body. They glided across the floor through aggressive traveling pathways even to progress into full leaps in the air. The dance became a beautiful contrast to the slower methodic movement from before. Drake and Horning moved with wonderful abandonment through the space.

Finally, at the trailing end of the evening, the dancers broke the fourth wall and walked towards the audience members to take them on the stage itself. Leading them by the hand, the dancers placed selected audience members in a space, sitting or standing, and without much speaking casted their gaze to the ceiling. Hidden within the overhead beams were projections of starlight images. Those not on the stage began to view a number of bodies collecting together looking up to the distance and gazing peacefully into the stars.

It was more than satisfying to participate in this performance. Each process and movement section was well thought out and rich with substance. Drake metaphorically led the audience by the hand through this complex journey of ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Astrophysics might have been the theme, but as a viewing audience member, there was so much diversity in movement dynamics, visual images, sounds and emotions, and it was easy to sit back and enjoy the performance.

Congratulations to the dancers for their beautiful performance and to Katie Sopoci Drake for being chosen to present in the Dance Metro DC Presentation Grant performance. *Spacetime Suite* was fully deserving of the accolades and the roar of the audience, including a standing ovation.