

DANCE

Duarte program emits energy, fanciful ideas

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It was exactly two years ago that Armondo Duarte, who'd taught at the University of Iowa since 1993, organized Duarte Dance Works as a means of nurturing and presenting his choreography in performance.

Dance review

Duarte Dance Works

Wednesday night the Brazilian native brought four of his young dancers with him to perform a program of solos and duets at the Clifton Center, which over recent seasons has been host to a diverse array of smaller companies.

Duarte revealed himself to be an artist of eclectic choreographic interests. I can't say that he emerged as a visionary in his pieces seen Wednesday, but most had appealing energy and reasonably fresh perspectives on the relationships between men and women — an inevitable focus when duets come to the foreground.

Occasionally he became a little too wrapped up in a conceit (fruit rolling on stage from the wings toward the end of "A Taste of an Orange" was a prime example), but he was able to engage his dancers consistently and make them intrinsic components of his method.

Sometimes the theatricality of Duarte's work lay in what isn't seen, or heard. The first portion of "A Taste of an Orange" was a heated pantomime between Duarte and Maureen Miner — he alone on a bench peeling an orange, she entering the space as a lover/interloper. When a phrase suddenly melted into a Brahms intermezzo, the transition had a logic all its own.

Stranger still "There is something out in the country that I think you want to take a look at," in which Laura Buckoltz drew every ounce of stamina in a splashing, leaping, wild cavort among buckets arrayed on the stage. The piece was all raw, animalistic excess, which was fine for a few minutes but ultimately a bit wearying to watch.

In "Serenade for Goodbye," the performances by Duarte and Jennifer Otto were almost trumped by the Mozart woodwind serenade that served as an exquisite musical backdrop.

Otto displayed remarkable, lithe flexibility during "Threshold," an extended solo choreographed by company dancer Daniel Stark to music by Philip Glass. Indeed, Stark contributed what ended up being by far Wednesday's strongest component: an excerpt from his 2003 work "Diplomacy."

Danced with seething, mutual menace by Stark and Buckoltz clad in formal dress, the piece brought to mind Kurt Jooss' 1932 classic, "The Green Table." Stark's conjuring, as a cap to Wednesday's Clifton program, was undeniably marvelous.