

Artists lope, swim and fly in solos of substance

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6 Women, 6 Solos

Kaeja d'Dance

Dancemakers Centre for Creation

In Toronto on Thursday

A dance solo is a very vulnerable act because the skills of both performer and choreographer are totally exposed. The solo show that Kaeja d'Dance has put together is a satisfying concert because it showcases senior artists who are mature in their craft. These are solos of substance performed by seasoned artists.

Competing in a strong field, Susan Lee wins the day with her own *Salvador*, set to a gentle marimba score by Egberto Gismonti. It is a dance in which Lee is never erect. The mysterious beginning has her emerging from the shadows, loping on her hands and toes like a monkey, and this animal image dominates the piece. As her liquid body flows from one position to another, twisting and turning, but never jarring, the jungle imagery becomes a metaphor for the animal side of human nature -- the cunning, the instinctive, the cautious.

Lee, however, is never totally the animal, but a fused being, and as she poses watchful at the end, the woman dominates and the animal becomes submerged. It is almost as if every fibre of her body is alive.

Karen Kaeja's *The Women's Project* is an ongoing series of solos created for women dancers. The newest creations are in collaboration with violinist/composer Parmela Attariwala, who also performs in the pieces. Named after the dancers, *Nova* (Nova Bhattacharya) and *Megan* (Megan Andrews) use the same Samm Higginson set -- four projection screens and three goldfish bowls -- but with different configurations, video design and costumes.

Kaeja's aim is to capture the physical essence of each woman, and while *Nova* is dark and weighty, performed in heavy black shoes, *Megan* is light, airy and sunny. The main interest of these works is how the fish metaphor is related to each dancer, and the integration of Attariwala as an eminence within the dance. *Nova* actually becomes the fish, telling its story to Attariwala's eerie scratchings, while Megan plays with the fish to a score close to classical music. While the former's movement is commanding, the latter's is delicate.

The formidable Kaeja takes on the role of performer in Jessica Runge's reflective *In an Empty House*, inspired by Margaret Atwood's poem *Morning in the Burned*

House and set to a John Corigliano score. It is a strong portrayal of a woman trying to gain control of herself, embedded with intense pauses, shifts of balance and sudden changes of direction.

Tanya Crowder performs two works, her own *My ribs hand a question to my mercurial hips*, and Allen Kaeja's *Icara*, both to scores by Edgardo Moreno. Crowder is a marvellous dancer with wonderful control. In her own piece, inspired by a love letter found among the pages of Samuel Beckett's play *Endgame*, her body is tortured, almost dislocated, as it struggles with thoughts of mortality and uncertainty. Kaeja, on the other hand, has given Crowder motion that soars and leaps to emulate flight. It is a dance of hope and optimism, mirroring mythical Icarus's attempt to reach the sun.

6 Women, 6 Solos continues through tonight.