

**Performance Review, *The Kennings*, Robert Moses' KIN, 30th Anniversary Season  
March 14-16, 2025 at Z-Space, San Francisco**

**By Kristen Cosby**

When you enter a Robert Moses KIN performance, you don't enter a dance but a universe, the portal to which is the stage. The rules of these universes change wildly with each show. Even a viewer familiar with Moses' work must expect the unexpected, and for the unexpected to arrive fast and furious and unrelenting, for his dancescapes run deep. There is no way to be prepared. Watching is a bit like speed reading *The Iliad*. Layer upon layer unfolds through limbs and torsos. *The Kennings* is no exception: you could see this show a hundred times, and still not find all its corners.

Like many of Moses' compositions, *The Kennings* is a multimedia performance. The piece opens with the omnipresent voice of the choreographer/narrator. Ten unmoving hooded figures line the upstage against a glowing red backdrop, their faces in shadow. But who are they? Phantoms? Monks? Thieves? A school? A brigade? The choreographer-narrator suggests a prism through which the viewer might interpret the show: "*This is the evidence of bodies represented in words like stowaway, turncoat, artisan ... . These are notes on the bodies of the enslaved that have grown unafraid of the light.*" The soundwaves of his voice oscillate in the form of luminance across rows of crystal beads that hang off-center from the ceiling. In this universe, words pulse as light and energy.

A giant AI-generated image of the choreographer's visage appears against the backdrop and continues the narration, Oz-like. Words and movement are not always in direct relationship in a RMK piece, but in *Kennings* the narration frames the entire dance and slowly reveals context. The hooded figures gather stage left, away from the Oz-like choreographer-narrator. And the giant face vanishes.

When the lights in the beaded curtains transform into an American flag, we understand. These are citizens. In pale hoodies and bare-legged, they are both tough and vulnerable. Their faces illuminate. They are very, very young. And they are here to tell us something serious.

A young dancer appears downstage right and raps in fury: "... *I left my home/ to come to America.*" Her riff tells of the things a young immigrant has left behind (mother, father, homeland, child) to come to this country. A country that made promises – to its immigrants, its children, its laborers, its artisans, its students – and has broken them.

The hooded figures echo in a call-and-response, and then break off brigade-style and chant a version of "Sound Off" as they begin to move: "*I don't know but I've been told, sleeping outside is mighty cold.*" A rhythmic electronic score (composed by Moses) drops, and the dancers' bodies begin to describe a glitchy, web-driven world of accusation, and the flinging and

contorting necessary to survive it. They complete staggered waves of one-handed backflips that oscillate across the landscape. The workmanship is incredibly athletic. Bodies fly, instead of leaping, and whirl instead of spinning. Their movements express an edgy paranoia, the fury of being betrayed, the grief over promises broken. Fingers point and movements stagger, as if infected by a slow web-connection. There is striving and ferocity, but relationships between individuals are scarce and without comfort. These eleven bodies tell us: it is a struggle just to *be* in this world. The narrator reappears in Oz form once again, seemingly to watch over the dancer-citizens, and saying nothing, vanishes.

Moses' voice-over narration continues. We are told these “ramblings and musings” are what was found in the wreckage after everyone with a pulse has been rounded up and interned, after unspeakable events have occurred. We are perhaps looking back on our present struggle, or the struggle that is soon to come (or one that should be happening), from a time in the future when these writings – these snippets – are found in the rubble of what was once America. The narration speaks of our own complicity in the dissolution: as artists, as citizens, as teachers.

When we look back at this time, or the time that is soon to come, at our youth and their fury, their striving and their energy, what patterns will it take?

The young dancers continue to show us.

A group of young women with contorted grins beg and shill and flirt. The music shifts from rhythmic to a slow vocal pulse and the formations on the stage shift to solos and duets and smaller collectives, while the others edge the stage. Two young men approach each other with jaguar-like caution. Bodies gyre around one young woman in a tightening whirlpool until she's strangled, and at the last second, pushed free. The hoodies are gone. Sweat drips from a young man's pale torso while, with head thrown back. He extends and curls his arms as if pinned by the spotlight.

As the level of energy descends, one dancer swims over a current of bodies that seem conditioned to roll continuously against her, and in a stunning and unique moment of tenderness, another dancer lifts her from the fray, sets her on her feet and guides her forward.

At last the brigade slows and gathers and the same young woman who was pulled from the current is lofted high by the entire group into the crystal curtains of sound and light. She wraps her fingers around the beads. Inviting anyone watching to believe that something better might be possible if we, too, could stop being afraid of the light.

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Kristen Cosby is a San Francisco based writer, teacher and performer. More of her musings can be found at [www.kristencosby.com](http://www.kristencosby.com).