

Performance Review, *New Legacies: One Acts* Robert Moses' KIN, 30th Anniversary Season

March 14-16, 2025 at Z-Space, San Francisco

By Kristen Cosby

Before the Storm

Created in collaboration with the dancers

Choreography: Nol Simonse

Soundscore: Lawrence Tomé (with spoken text by the dancers, and Andy Chappell on bass trombone)

Dramaturgy: Jim Cave

Large and unseen threats approach in Nol Simonse's new work, *Storm is Coming*. Even before the lights come up, anxiety permeates the air. From the dark comes the sound of footsteps rapidly pounding the stage. Three young dancers, their clothing suggesting that they have been awoken in the night or pulled away from a soft moment by the need to flee, stand close together. Soft music swells. Their limbs move sharply and angularly. They vibrate and shake with anxiety, with energy that is stuck and bound. Their faces and bodies tell us, something fearful looms, something unseen and all-around. These are bodies primed to run. But there is no escape. Running, when it happens, occurs in place. No one is able to flee. Hands flap in nervousness. Large fears wrench through each individual.

The gentle opening music gives way to a sound score that harkens to fog horns, a periodic low tone of warning. In the sounds-scape, co-created by Lawrence Tome and Jim Cave, three voices, those of the three movers on stage, answer unspoken questions:

I never really thought about my last day.

I think I want to be remembered as a generous girl.

Hopefully I will find time when we can laugh, talk and cry.

I feel like I only saw the empty vessel of what you were.

This generation is very ancient because we are consuming so many things.

I hope I find true love.

I don't even know if anything I wrote on my paper is true...

The group fragments for the latter half of the piece into a rotation of duets and solos. Because they are three, two bodies against one, there's a sense that someone might be left out or left behind as they determine how to shelter or flee.

But whatever the future might hold and however afraid they may be, the three bodies on stage find comfort in each other. When a duo or the entire trio gathers, they touch in solace. *We have each other*, their bodies tell us. At the finale, they gather into a tight V-formation, and the triad slowly, tentatively begins a foray towards something more luminous and hopeful.

We See Her Through Holding

Directed and Co-Choreographed by: Yayoi Kambara and Loni Landon

Composer: Angela Yam

Librettist: Janesta Edmonds

Performed and Co-Created by: Kai Julian Ava and Janesta Edmonds

Midway through *We See Her Through Holding* by Yayoi Kambara and Loni Landon, a young man places a blanket on the floor center stage and a young woman steps upon it, while the young man hands her an apple. She eats. He departs and returns and hands her a swaddled bundle that distinctly resembles a baby. As the two other male dancers continue to laden her arms with bags, boxes, a camping chair, blankets, even a dog on a leash, the young woman must hold the apple in her mouth, effectively gagging herself. It's absurd, what she's being asked to do. How much can this woman's body carry? What have we done to her? She suddenly drops her burdens and spits out the apple, which rolls downstage towards the audience.

Witnessing is important in this narrative. The piece opens with a chair, a side-table, and lamp upstage right. The piece's dramaturge, Janesta Edmonds, takes a seat in the chair, and snaps on the light. Throughout the piece, they sit in observation of what appears onstage.

A woman clad in a dark silk shirt solos and is soon joined by two male dancers, also in dark silk. They trio, duet, and solo, taking horizontal space with large, long extensions of limb and spine. They seemingly hover. Two of the dancers sit side by side to watch the third solo, and then begin their own duet from the floor. At first one puts her arms around the other, but he moves away from her embrace, with a feeling that their actions are falling short, that these two are unable to connect despite trying.

Then the blanket is laid down, and the apple and baby appear.

After spitting out the apple, the young woman dances alone – away from the pile of burdens – until the trio build themselves into a human tower, one body slides from between the other two, and the young woman bends backward over one companion while holding the hand of the other.

The witness in the chair stands and begins to circle them, narrating a journey from before birth to the present.

“You were called from the stars,” they tell them, describing what might be a gestation, or a surreal dream, or everything that has become *you*.

“When did you first realize you were magic?” they ask thrice.

“When did you ever forget?”

Where You Are

Choreography and Text: Megan & Shannon Kurashige, in collaboration with the dancers

Music: Erika Oba

Costumes: Emily Kurashige

Where You Are is choreographed by sisters Megan and Shannon Kurashige, known as Sharp and Fine. In it three dancers stand in triangular formation, two with their backs to the audience, one facing outward between their shoulders. Her face, serious. She is petite and clad in a yellow summer dress that renders her girlish. She places her hand on the young man’s shoulder, and they begin to move.

The girl in a summer dress solos, while the other two remain turned away – the man, standing, and the second, a woman in a denim jumpsuit, sits on a wooden chair next to an old rotary telephone. The girl in the yellow dress leaps and curls her body into a question mark mid-air. Her face and movements are open and joyous.

She approaches the tall man and holds a microphone to his mouth while kneeling.

“Ring, ring,” he says.

The dancer seated on the chair looks at the phone but ignores it.

“Ring, *ring!*”

She picks up.

“What is it like not to be able to move?” he asks.

The jumpsuited dancer sets down the receiver, contorts her body and vibrates. The young man looks at the girl in the yellow dress. She shakes her head.

“Sorry, I don’t understand. Could you expand on that?”

The woman on the phone lies sideways on the chair and shakes.

“No, that’s still not it.”

She balances upon the chair on one foot in an entirely bound position, ensnared by the phone cord.

“Yes, I think I understand.”

The questions continue until we get to the final query: “How does joy feel, where you are?”

The jumpsuited dancer is pressed to give examples – first, dancing an extended soft-shoe style, then doing an air-guitar improv, until finally she stands atop the chair and leaps into the caller’s arms.

As the dancers duet, the man leans against his partner for comfort. The girl in yellow moves the chair downstage and places an oversized box on it. Back inside the duet, the man’s actions grow more frantic, until his partner embraces and holds him. They end with the jumpsuited woman sitting in profile on her partner’s back, as if he were a bench.

Downstage, the girl in yellow opens the box from which an enormous white helium balloon emerges. She sits on the chair and says she’d like to tell us a joke about a woman who thought she saw a ghost, which she delivers in rapid Portuguese, and ends with a scream. (Hint: she has an identical twin.)

When she moves again, she rejoins the trio, and their play becomes infectious – with jumps and spins and legs aloft. At last, the jumpsuited dancer stands atop the chair holding the balloon aloft with the girl in yellow seated aside, while the young man completes a solo full of height. Then, he leaps impossibly high and, popping the balloon, sends multicolored bits of joy raining down over them all.

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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.