

SAHARAVA: A Ritualized Dance-Opera

nytheatre.com review by Judith Jarosz
August 10, 2012

Sahavara is a dance piece which “relies on vocalists to provide the structural framework of the piece while dancers tell the narrative through movement,” and is based on the transformative ritual based on the structure of the Major Arcana in the tarot deck of cards. These 22 cards of the Tarot begin with card 0, the Fool, and tell the story of the Fool’s journey from ignorance to understanding. (This bit of information would have been helpful to have in the program. I had to find it on their website). The piece was created between Fahad Siadat and Andre Megerdichian as a joint master’s thesis at the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles and is their first collaboration. Megerdichian serves as Director and Choreographer with Siadat as Composer and Music Director, as well as singing the role of The Magician.

Over the course of an hour we are shown ten parts of this piece labeled: Prelude, Invocation, Birth, Celebration, Journey, Trial, Funeral, Rending, Constellations & Return. Vocalists and instrumentalists surround the six dancers, occasionally joining in with some movement. While I am intrigued by the Tarot story, I must say frankly, that had I not gone to the website and read more about this piece, I would not have picked up on the basis for the story I watched. Watching the scenes about life, love, birth, death, and what we all go through in a lifetime, didn’t reveal anything new, but that being said, the piece moves at a swift pace under Siadat’s direction and his modern choreography is executed with a wonderful expressiveness and athletic fierceness by the talented dancers Mary Madsen (The Fool), Marissa Maislen, Andrew Notarile, Kevin Santiago Piñero, Amir Salah-Din & Daron Wehle. The music uses a lot of repeated droning type phrases and chants, with occasional gasping and shrieking, which alternately soothes or irritates, depending on your taste, and perhaps that was the composer’s intent. The singers & instrumentalists of the large ensemble were intensely focused throughout the piece. They include, A. J. Block (Didgeridoo, Percussion), Rachel Burttram (The Lovers), Jenny Chen (Death), Elizabeth Derham (Violin, Vocalist), Joshua Garcia (The Emperor), Mario Gullo (The Hierophant), Karen Jolicoeur (The Empress), Joule L’adara (The Hanged Man, also Violin), Greg Loewer Jr. (Lead Percussion), Jimmy Robertson (The Lovers), David Niles, Leandra Ramm (also Flute), Karen Jolicoeur, Nina Riley (The High Priestess), and Fahad Siadat (The Magician).

Costume Designer Derek Lockwood’s flowing ivory togas suited the body types and the movement well. Scarf & Textile Designer Eric Hatch’s hanging cloth drops across the back of the otherwise empty stage were attractive and colorful, and Lighting Designer Andy Miyamoto did a lovely job of highlighting certain moments of the piece.



nytheatre.com is made possible, in part, by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature and from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

