

Daniel Jaber: "Reassessment—a Double Bill" -
Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre, 9 August, 2014

DANCE AUSTRALIA

With "Reassessment", Daniel Jaber presents a thought-provoking double bill that explores issues of identity, sexuality and gender. Jaber's interest in using critical theory and text as a springboard for dance that draws heavily on the balletic vocabulary, as he did in last year's *Nought*, is in evidence in both pieces, but with markedly different effects. His forty-minute solo *Too Far Again, Not Far Enough...* is the more provocative, and to my mind, memorable, whereas the ensemble piece *Agile* is witty and lighter of heart.

The first work, *Too Far Again, Not Far Enough...*, was awarded Best Dance and the Adelaide Festival Centre's Inspace award at the 2010 Adelaide Fringe. Since that time it's been reworked as an ensemble piece, but has now been re-crafted as a stronger solo that explores different aspects of an individual's notion of self-worth. On a red-lit stage the bare-chested Jaber, upstage with his back to the audience, flagellates himself with a whip. The imagery seems as much religious as sexual though, and this is born out in the next section, which is performed to an American evangelical voice over that equates an individual's value with being a "worthy vessel of God". Clad next in track pants and T-shirt and standing downstage, Jaber assumes an anxious and awkward persona, crossing and uncrossing his arms, sticking his hands in and out of his pockets. This escalates into a frantic series of gestural tics from which he falls backwards, slapping his body into the floor from various angles. What follows is an extraordinary fluid and graceful sequence, with high extensions and jumps: the impression is of breaking free from angst and self-loathing.

Another section explores the idea of self-worth in relation to material possessions, with a female voice relating the increasingly mercenary nature of gender relations in contemporary China, whilst Jaber clutches greedily at a series of blocks and counters. The final section begins with a voice over retelling the murder of a young man for swishing his hips too much—not conforming to masculine norms, in other words. Washed discreetly in red light, a naked Jaber rises on to demi-pointe, and sways his from hips to side to side as if taking the place of the murdered boy. In his final solo, Jaber seems to be probing the distinctions of gender, interspersing stereotypically feminine and masculine movements. The piece ends with him back to the self-flagellation, whilst slides project Judith Butler's essay on the difficulty of giving a coherent account of yourself—even to your self. This is a powerfully moving work that stays in the mind.

Agile is a work for four dancers, in this performance Kimball Wong, Kialea-Nadine Williams, Madeleine Edwards and Alexander Baden-Bryce, set to Susan Leigh Foster's amusing essay, "The Ballerina's Phallic Point". Dressed by Ruby & Prankstar in an intriguing mix of black tights with violet drapes and leather straps, the dancers work in concert, and in a variety of duets, using the ballet vocabulary as a counterpoint to Foster's argument about the fetishization of the ballerina. The different shapes and sizes of the dancers here also work to call into question ballet's privileging of a specific body type; the result is entertaining and stylish.

"Reassessment" gives ample reason for Leigh Warren's decision to hand his company over to Jaber; the two works on offer demonstrate Jaber's facility with step making coupled with a keen intelligence and a strongly individual voice.

- Maggie Tonkin

BWW Reviews: REASSESSMENT - A DOUBLE BILL Highlights the Choreography of Daniel Jaber

Reassessment - directed and choreographed by Daniel Jaber, begins with Jaber in a solo work, *Too far again, not far enough...*, followed by a piece for four dancers, *Agile*, with Alexander Baden-Bryce, Madeline Edwards, Kialea-Nadine Williams, and Kimball Wong. Jaber was announced as the new resident choreographer of Leigh Warren Dancers in April and will take over as Artistic Director in 2015, with Leigh Warren mentoring him initially.

Jaber's solo work won awards at the 2010 Adelaide Fringe and he has tightened and further developed the piece since then. The second work is also a piece that has been further developed and refined from its earlier version. He began his piece with the concept of self-worth, expanding to embrace other ideas of worthiness, our perceived worth in the eyes of other, their worth in our eyes, and within this he encompasses gender identity.

Jaber gives a magnificent demonstration of control, a myriad of quick, intimate movements of the hands and arms, flowing sections, moments of perfect stillness and more, exhibiting the emotional ideas within the work of fear of rejection, anxiety, self-doubt, fear of difference and being different, the effects of commercialism on relationships and so much more. His dancing is illuminated by the animations of Matthias Waldt, the sound compositions of Thomas Jeker and the lighting of Daniel Barber. These three combine to add a great deal to the moods presented by Jaber in this remarkable work.

The quartet then looks at the traditions of classical ballet and suggests that it has perpetuated perversions in the roles and attributes expected of men and women, purporting that the ballerina is a phallic symbol. Gender roles are blurred and body image considered. One couple's dancing conforms to the expected norm, while the other couple swap role, the woman dancing the man's part and vice versa. The two women dance together, and the two men dance together. None of the four fit the somewhat ridiculous physical shapes required by ballet companies, overly slim, tall, often seeming almost androgynous.

There is a playfulness, a lightness to this work that the dancers embrace, enjoying their chance to poke fun at the establishment. They parody classical ballet but, at the same time, demonstrate that they do have the necessary skills to dance in this style, as evidenced by many of the classical steps and positions, and the pointe work, that is then juxtaposed against, and blended with contemporary dance and modern thought. The high level of training and experience the four dancers bring to this piece is extensive, including such renowned institutions as the Melbourne Ballet Company and the Australian Dance Theatre. Not surprisingly, they understand both sides of the question and create some convincing dialogues within the piece that do, indeed, leave one thinking about the history and culture of dance.

Jaber is set to be a great asset to the Leigh Warren Dancers and is establishing himself solidly as an innovative and informed choreographer. It is with great interest that I look forward to seeing what the future holds for Adelaide audiences.

Reassessment – A Double Bill

JENNY TOUNE | 7 AUGUST 2014 IN DAILY

DANCE REVIEW | Gender: a combination of body and self or a social construct? In *Too Far Again, Not Far Enough* and *Agile*, the two parts of *Reassessment*, choreographer Daniel Jaber explores gender and sexuality through the marriage of movement, sound, video and text.

It's a beautiful step away from homogeneity, and one which challenges the audience to reconfigure their own pre-conceived ideas about the binary (or not-so-binary) system.

The first work, *Too Far Again, Not Far Enough*, looks at that which exists beneath the actions we assume to be "worthy". Jaber's search for self becomes more than the movements of the dancer – "What you can do isn't what you are." And what he does is provocative – self-flagellation, convulsion, precision, contraction and exposure – while the text describes the instability of painting an accurate picture of the self.

Agile describes the perverse aesthetic of the classical pas de deux, the female dancer a representation of penis, a homoerotic vision for the male. Performed brilliantly by Alexander Bryce, Madeline Edwards,

Kialea-Nadine Williams and Kimball Wong, it questions the initial concept of male/female partnerships in classical ballet, the ornamental use of gender and the nullifying effect of ballet as a decorative art.

Jaber's work is confrontational yet poignant, executed with a poetic ferocity reminiscent of Lloyd Newson's DV8. It will be a pleasure to watch his growth at the helm of Leigh Warren Dance in the coming years.

Dancer Daniel Jaber explores gender in his Double Bill

- ALAN BRISSENDEN
- [THE AUSTRALIAN](#)

SINCE winning two 2010 Adelaide Fringe awards with his first work, *Too Far Again, Not Far Enough...*, Daniel Jaber has refined and strengthened this gender-themed solo.

On the soundtrack earnest voices, mostly American, discourse on such matters as self-image, relationships and the effect of materialism on marriage, symbolised by a village of tiny wooden houses. One voice tells the story of a boy who was ridiculed at school and eventually killed owing to the effeminate way he walked.

A charismatic dancer, Jaber holds his audience throughout a series of sequences, expressing anxiety in flickering hands and fast-moving arms, frustration by a hand imprisoning his mouth as his body twists and turns, femininity by fluent classically based choreography. This last leads into the story of the murdered boy, and as the wide performance space is bathed in red light, Jaber strips and begins to walk barefoot on demi-pointe, as if wearing high heels (as he did in the 2010 version), his taut bodily control powerfully reflects the troubling paradox of a female being within a male body.

The work ends with a return to clothing, Jaber in a vulnerable position on hands and knees on top of a box from which he had swept the model village he had placed there earlier. At the same time, questions and answers about individuals having to find their own narrative scroll on a screen. His narrative is expressed with depth and meaning through vital, imaginative dance.

In *Agile*, the second half of the program, Jaber continues his exploration of gender, this time through historical interpretations of classical ballet. For more than a century, for instance, men, clothed in effeminate tights, were considered to be there to support the ballerina and do little else.

While a voice describes the gendered basis of ballet, including some surprising claims (is a ballerina really a phallic symbol?), Alexander Bryce, Madeline Edwards, Kialea-Nadine Williams and Kimball Wong, perform classically based movements with a difference. A parodic pas de deux for the men and a gender-reversed pas de deux for couples are demanding for the dancers and amusing for the audience, but make a significant statement.

The cast dances with vivacity, assurance and seriousness. But there is just too much talk — much judicious editing is needed.

Crossbreeding the classical with the contemporary, Jaber is successfully developing his own choreographic style. It augurs well for him taking over Leigh Warren Dance next year.