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Bridgman/Packer offers dreamlike, whimsical experience

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Dancers Myrna Packer and Art Bridgman move together with an intimacy and grace and trust that only come with years of collaboration.

Their beauty as dance partners is something you could appreciate all on its own. But they have found a way to present dance that is so innovative, so rich and full and human, that the dance becomes just one element in an art that incorporates — well, everything.

This was what the audience at the Miller Center for the Arts witnessed Saturday night when Bridgman/Packer Dance presented a world premiere of their “Table Bed Mirror,” and a performance of their 2012 Bessie Award-winning “Voyeur.” Both employ video technology, lighting, hand-woven soundtracks, theater techniques and dance to create a world of experience.

“Table Bed Mirror” explores the world of dreams. Opening with whispered texts explaining the neurophysiology of dreaming sprinkled with phrases of dream absurdities, the couple sat on a “bed,” watching their shadows.

When they sprang down and entered the dream, video images of disconnected arms and legs appeared on upended tables; the real dancers appeared and disappeared, interacting with their ephemeral doubles until it was difficult to distinguish who was real.

During quieter sections, with piano music by Liszt and Tchaikovsky and whispered dream talk, they moved with their own images, which were later captured and then looped and projected on the table screens as Balkan Beat Box intensified the movements, including some interesting microphone play by Packer.

As they entered REM sleep, the dream became a narrative, with the dancers searching for each other among doors that opened and revealed flying forks, flapping clothes on a line, and even a giraffe.

“Voyeur” was inspired by the paintings of Edward Hopper, and Bridgman and Packer have used video of various Hopper-related buildings created by Peter Bobrow, and lighting design by Frank DenDanto III, to capture the moody, often ominous atmosphere of those paintings.

Robert Een’s soundscape featured trains and wind, doors slamming, phones ringing, and period music on a distant radio to help bring you into that world.

But the use of video to create depth of field and the clever blending of video projections and real movements, often glimpsed in the two windows and a door of the schematic set, are what gave this piece its brilliance.

The building changed through projections, and the couple’s actions inside projected on the outside of the house suggested struggle and lovemaking, with gestures menacing and tender, intimate and alienated.

At the center of the piece, we’re briefly inside with Packer as she stares calmly at the ocean through a window. Then, suddenly, the stage is crowded with images and figures in a complex, moving carousel of all that has happened before, entire lives sweeping by and caught up in a vertiginous celebration of all it means to be human.

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