

DANCE REVIEW: David Dorfman Dance at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival

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Written by Alex Bloomstein



David Dorfman Dance in "(A) Way Out of My Body" at Jacob's Pillow. Photo by Cherylynn Tsushima.

[Jacob's Pillow](#) has an exceedingly long and illustrious dance history, as most people know. What is also remarkable, however, is how many of the choreographers and dancers who grace the Pillow stages each summer have a connection to the Pillow in their past. And sometimes that connection is not so direct. During her curtain speeches, Jacob's Pillow Executive and Artistic Director Pamela Tatge often delights in letting the audience know how the artists they are about to see are connected to the Pillow, and she did so again this past weekend when [David Dorfman](#) brought his company, [David Dorfman Dance](#), to the outdoor Henry J. Leir Stage. Ms. Tatge noted that Dorfman first came to the Pillow as a dancer with [Susan Marshall & Company](#) way back in 1987. He then returned with his own company for the first time in 1993, and he has had a relationship with the Pillow ever since.

Dorfman has been making dances for nearly 40 years. As he himself notes, during that time he has “created movement-based theater that seeks to destigmatize the notion of accessibility and interaction in post-modern dance by embracing audiences with radically humanistic, visceral, dance, music, and text.” While that may be a bit of a mouthful, Dorfman then clarifies by saying he simply wants to “get the whole world dancing.”



Lily Gelfand, Kashia Kancey, Nik Owens, and Claudia-Lynn Rightmire in “(A) Way Out of My Body” at Jacob’s Pillow. Photo by Cherylynn Tsushima.

This past weekend, Dorfman and his company of excellent dancers brought his piece “(A) Way out of my Body” to the Leir Stage. He describes the piece as a “meditation on the frailty and power of the body, the beauty of our collective will, the magic of touch, and the promise of hope.” The dancers included Dorfman and his wife Lisa Race, and, given the theme of the work, their individual performances were all the more meaningful and powerful. They have the years of experience that give their dancing gravitas.



David Dorfman Dance in “(A) Way Out of My Body” at Jacob’s Pillow. Photo by Cherylynn Tsushima.

Dorfman's choreography is interesting in its layering. On the one hand, the movement and the shapes created are comfortingly familiar, and the structure is very organized. Dorfman's use of space; his patterning; his use of recognizable movement constructs like canon, unison, repetition, call and response; and his use of partnering are all gratifyingly identifiable. Moreover, the sections of the work are very clear in the transitions from one to the next. His dances just make sense as they unfold and build, even though they can have spontaneity and surprises along the way. In this piece, the original music, which was gorgeous, alongside the superb dancing, was very much the glue which held the work together.

On the other hand, Dorfman injected text into the piece, as he sometimes does. And, initially, the layering of that text was a bit opaque and mysterious. Fortunately, two things were true: First, as noted above, the work otherwise made complete sense visually and musically, so you could always fall back to just watching the piece and letting the text wash over you; second, when Dorfman himself delivered an autobiographical monologue (while dancing, I might add), the text began to make more sense.

The story Dorfman told was about his mother, who had multiple sclerosis, and about the relationship he had with her and the relationship they both had with movement (and dancing) during her illness. It is a tribute to Dorfman's self-effacing and unassuming persona that this part of the piece, which could maybe have ended up being self-indulgent, was most decidedly not; it had a

heartening lightness even while it was poignant and moving. That striking apposition was wonderfully developed by Dorfman throughout the entire piece.



David Dorfman, Lisa Race, and Lily Gelfand in “(A) Way Out of My Body” at Jacob’s Pillow. Photo by Cherylynn Tsushima.

A note on the Pillow’s use of the outdoor Leir Stage. In 2020, the Pillow lost The Doris Duke Theater, one of its key performance spaces, to a fire. Since then, while the Pillow rebuilds the theater, it seems apparent that the outdoor Leir Stage has had to do extra duty as a performance space. I don’t know if David Dorfman Dance would have performed inside the Duke Theater had it not burned down (I am thinking they might have), but what I do know is that

sometimes life can be poetically surprising. Last Saturday evening, rain was threatening the entire time the company was performing, and I was wondering if the performance would have to be stopped because of rain. Then, at literally the very end of the performance, during a very tender moment between two of the dancers—one of whom presumably represented Dorfman’s mother—a very slow and gentle rain began to fall. It was the absolute perfect ending to the piece, and something that could not have happened indoors. To my mind, therefore, it was something beautiful to have come out of that terrible fire.



Lily Gelfand, Kashia Kancey, Nik Owens, and Claudia-Lynn Rightmire in “(A) Way Out of My Body” at Jacob’s Pillow. Photo by Cherylynn Tsushima.

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