LEVI GONZALEZ DANCE

* selected press

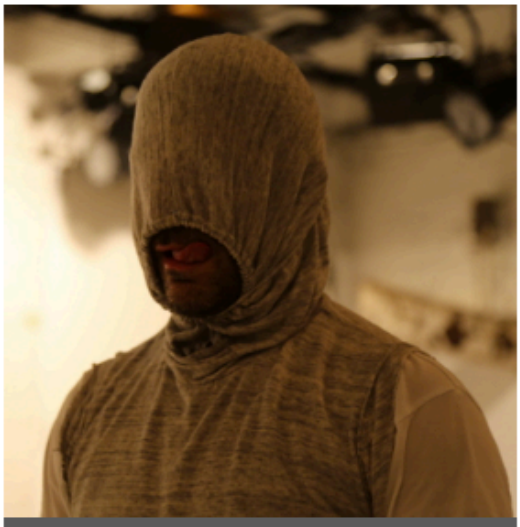
levi-gonzalez.com

Levi Gonzalez's *The Craft of the Father*: A stomach ache, or just what a performance is like?

★★★★☆

By Rachel Rizzuto, 28 April 2014

Levi Gonzalez's *The Craft of the Father* is a piece that manages to convey spontaneity and realness, even as it follows what must be a highly structured architecture of sequence and interaction. Mr Gonzalez adeptly combines vulnerability with the grotesque, leaving his audience with a wonderful feeling of exclusivity, as if they have just seen something private and revealing.



The Craft of the Father

© Brian Rogers

Mr Gonzalez, according to the Chocolate Factory Theater website, is concerned with the body and its innards, and how that translates to the act of giving a performance ("if it was all one big collection of nerves and guts and thoughts and feelings"). The body's part in this piece is introduced from the very beginning. As the three performers – Mr Gonzalez is one of them – lie supine on the floor, we begin to hear groans and belches and wheezes and yawns and other odd noises, made all the odder by almost total darkness. It's as if we're listening to three disembodied voices from their existence in the womb – or maybe we're just hearing them emerge from a very deep slumber. Or else they all have food poisoning. It's not quite humorous, but that feeling of having intruded on something private is immediately noticeable, with the caveat that we who have intruded are also welcomed, too.

SEE FULL LISTING

Reviewed at Chocolate Factory Theater, New York City on 25 April 2014

PROGRAMME

The Craft of the Father

PERFORMERS

Levi Gonzalez, *Dancer*

Kayvon Pourazar, *Dancer*

Eleanor Smith, *Dancer*

The Craft of the Father

© Brian Rogers

The next hour or so is tightly structured, though rapidity of sections and moments of complete surprise make it feel off-the-cuff. Mr Gonzalez lumbers around the stage right space like a desperate bear just awoken from hibernation, throwing his mass around, seemingly without a care or plan. Kayvon Pourazar, always a compelling performer, adopts a series of lightning-fast tics and, later, a probing tongue. Eleanor Smith, staying mostly stage left, is doing movement that more closely resembles recognizable dance: a series of circles within a larger circular path. Tennis shoes, worn by all three, are eventually removed, and everything just gets weirder – and yet more and more endearing. The three dancers strike poses, some balletic (Mr Pourazar's high fifth relevé) and some dramatic (Mr Gonzalez's diva bits). Mr Pourazar ties his hood so tightly around his face that only his mouth shows; a spotlight appears on him, and he lip-syncs Kate Bush's "This Woman's Work" as Tatyana Tenenbuam (who I had previously assumed was working lights) sings it live.

The Craft of the Father

Eventually, Mr Gonzalez announces that "that's enough." His two cast members gather round him, pouring sweat, to briefly discuss how this night's performance has gone differently than past nights'. The audience is not exactly excluded – Mr Gonzalez assures us, with his back turned, that he hasn't forgotten about us – but still the feeling of glimpsing something private pervades. We begin to feel special and lucky that we get to see these performers outside of the piece, overhearing what might be their dressing room talk.

The dancing begins again. The three performers begin a contact improvisation clump that moves across the space, ending up mostly on the floor. Grotesque sounds, now more humorous than before, accompany this section too.

Later, Mr Gonzalez begins jogging around the space in a circle. He is joined by his fellow cast members, one by one. At times, Mr Gonzalez looks as if he might falter and stop running, but he does not. He announces that this time will be the last time. And it is – the piece has ended with the same feeling of naturalness and pleasant voyeurism that it began with.

The New York Times

DANCE REVIEW

High Winds, a Rock Star Moment and a Touch of the Velvet Underground

Amanda Loulaki and Levi Gonzalez at the Kitchen

Julieta Cervantes for The New York Times

Amanda Loulaki and Levi Gonzalez are on a double bill at the Kitchen. Ms. Loulaki, above, dances in her piece "Untitled," which uses large fans.

By CLAUDIA LA ROCCO
Published: February 10, 2012

Amanda Loulaki and Levi Gonzalez deserve to have their own evenings of work, so that their quietly loaded dances have the time and space to resonate with their audiences. But if they are to be presented on a shared bill, they might as well be with each other, as they were at the opening of a run at the Kitchen on Thursday night, when each unveiled a premiere.

...

What came after the intermission was a different, more explicitly naked vulnerability, in Mr. Gonzalez's "Counterfeit Scenario." Created with input from the terrifically honed dancer Natalie Green, this duet explores a host of relationships and power dynamics: between performer and choreographer, between artist and audience, between self and self.

As Mr. Gonzalez's title underlines, all performances are artificial on some level. Here he attempts to exploit and subvert that, presenting "Counterfeit Scenario" as something of a rehearsal in which he — and Ms. Green, following his verbal prompts — is trying to build the finished performance. Of course, they are doing so inside a show that is already fully produced, with costumes by Emily Roysdon (including a handsome deep blue uniform of sorts for Mr. Gonzalez), a spacious score by Justin Luchter and voluptuous, theatrical lighting design by Mr. Levasseur.

Mr. Gonzalez, who has a long and impressive history as a dancer in other people's work, of course knows what it is to be in Ms. Green's shoes, and the two are teasing out all sorts of interesting questions. But where "Counterfeit Scenario" really sings is at the level of the heart.

"I guess we're really killing the momentum of the piece here," Mr. Gonzalez said late in the game, staring out at the audience with a face both sly and windblown. Ms. Green waited for an external cue, he waited for an internal one, and the audience waited for something, anything.

What came, a small, blooming dance set to "I'll Be Your Mirror" by the Velvet Underground (oh, pop songs, forever destroyers of dances!), was just what needed to come. It was worth the wait.

Amanda Loulaki and Levi Gonzalez perform through Saturday at the Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 255-5793, thekitchen.org.

DanceBeat
Deborah Jowitt on bodies in motion

Take Them Disappearing

February 15, 2012 By Deborah Jowitt Leave a Comment

Amanda Loulaki laboring in her *Untitled*. Photo: Paula Court

Not far into Gonzalez's *Counterfeit Scenario*, I want to hit him with something heavy. He's definitely, knowingly, asking for it. After introducing Green as an equal (they both slog in separate, curving paths around the space, their bodies leaning forward, feet sliding along), he becomes the choreographer and she his willing instrument. Justin Luchter's score, which has begun as a low rumble and yielded up a sudden crash, slips away, and Gonzalez, at the mic, makes increasingly impossible demands on Green. His voice never rises above an almost caressing tone. "Do a dance of intricate gestures," he orders Green, then asks her to add "sweeping arcs of the limbs." Her dancing is a marvel of intrepidness—fluid, articulate, rich, but Gonzalez's's ongoing advice results in conflicts and confusion. How is she to interpret "raw vulnerability?" The audience is onto him—hating the "choreographer," chuckling at the absurdity of his demands.

You can laugh too at his monologue performed in near darkness; his soothing voice and suggestions for relaxing and sensing your inner motions could be related to any number of body-centered healers and teachers, except that his advice becomes creepier and creepier (my favorite: "feel your intestines slipping against each other") and gradually veers toward suggestiveness. At the end, he invites the listeners (not us, but us), with their now decomposed bodies, to stand up, if they can.

Once Green goes to the mic, but finds she has nothing she wants to say. However, along with occasional remarks by Gonzalez about what they should be doing (he isn't sure), the two do dance together. Throbbing musical tones and what sound like submerged Irish voices creep into the score, then a bass sound so low it makes your stomach vibrate. Gonzalez and Green walk along, mirror each other, and dance in understated side-by side unison, as if they're having a nice, easy-going time. And we're left to applaud the very theatrical anti-theatricality of the piece, and to head home contemplating what's counterfeit and what's real, and how much of the "realness" might be an illusion and the presumed spontaneity planned. Even when you believe you have the answers, you know Gonzalez has counted on your asking the questions.

GIMME SHELTER: Performance Now

Gimme Shelter | Power Games or Two at the Kitchen

February 24th, 2012 by Marissa Perel

Everyone by Miguel Gutierrez and the Powerful People, photo by Alex Escalante

What is a faygo shower?

new artists, new films

New films in *New York Close Up* premiering throughout 2012

flash points

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The following weekend, Feb. 9-11, the Kitchen presented the premier of *Counterfeit Scenario*, a dance about making a dance by choreographer Levi Gonzalez (on a shared bill with Amanda Loulaki). Though a comparison cannot be made between the aesthetics of Medlyn and Gonzalez, it can be made between their respective examinations of power. *Counterfeit Scenario* plays with performer-audience and choreographer-dancer dynamics to reveal the schisms in these relationships. It begins with a booming sound and bright lights, not unlike the beginning of a magic show. Between these elements and Gonzalez's cobalt blue shirt and pants (designed by Emily Roysdon), there is a David Copperfield-like quality to the theatrics. Gonzalez and dancer Natalie Green slide their feet across the stage, looking downwards for a long time, as if they are searching for, or laboring to find, momentum (Gonzalez calls it "loping"). A microphone is positioned downstage as if it were a third performer. Gonzalez steps up to it, and then the performance unravels. He directs Green to "perform minimal raw excess," as she exhausts herself to find the right quality of movement. He then asks her to perform some of the choreography with names of phrases that Green can't always remember or execute. Gaps in memory or translation are laid bare as the choreographer's power is drained of its magical quality, eliminating the hierarchy between Gonzalez and Green.

She sits in a chair as he leads a visualization exercise that becomes increasingly absurd. Visualization methods such as the Skinner Release Technique are often part of the warm-up process for modern dancers, but here, Gonzalez delivered it for the benefit of the audience as well. As audience-participation exercises have become ubiquitous (to the point that I now want to roll my eyes every time a performer asks me to close them) this exercise had less to do with participation than it did with parody. Gonzalez goes from asking us to imagine the length of the spine down to the anus, opening up the anus, then opening the anus into a sexual encounter with him and so on. The instruction-monologue goes on for a long time, and we know that it is going nowhere. But it revealed all that is blocked out in the studio, when it is time to work. Opening up the imagination speaks to utility and the capacity to execute the performance, but is there also room for desire, distraction, inappropriate thought? Is there a time to stop and masturbate? Gonzalez exposes these thoughts and perseveres. He then continues trying to direct Green through a series of phrases with comical titles, like "room flip," and " jumping 180 degrees to face the front and back of the stage while looking surprised."

At one point Gonzalez says, "We're killing the momentum of the piece now," and looks out at the audience. Green also stares. It's clearly a performance of failure, but it doesn't feel affected. In letting go of control, Gonzalez reveals every artist's true fear: losing the idea, hold, momentum. He allows us into this space, asks us to witness it, and still see the work. The piece continues with bits of humor and anxiety, as the two "perform material that is not in the piece," showing how little is used in comparison to how much is created, what is thrown away, rejected. *Counterfeit Scenario* challenges the idea of performance as static, as an object, as just one dance by including the whole process, and in so doing declares that it is really everything.

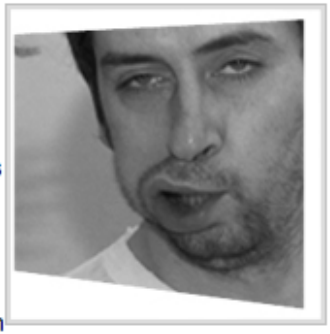
Green and Gonzalez "loping through space."

Categorized | Feature, Interviews
Tags | 10 minutes with, BAX, levi gonzalez, mdonohue

10 Minutes with Levi Gonzalez

Posted on 29 April 2011 by Maura Donohue

This weekend, Levi Gonzales premiers his first completed work in 4 years at Brooklyn Arts Exchange. The result of a year-long BAX Artist Residency, "Intimacy" is a solo performance that uses text, meditation and movement and was developed in collaboration with dramaturg Susan Mar Landau. I spoke with him briefly this morning.



I read in your recent Brooklyn Eagle interview that there were substantial financial issues, in addition to your artistic interest that fed the choice to make solo work. Can you talk a bit more about that? It was partly financial. I am still in debt from *clusterfuck* in 2007. I've been thinking about how to create a working process where I don't compromise because of money and I'm working within my means. I don't want to completely llimit myself to money, but keeping things within the realm of where resources are available without forcing myself to do less was an interesting challenge. Doing a solo seemed like it would be great with this residency. I didn't have to worry about paying many people and I could just dig in. The way I make material is something I wanted to focus on. The role of being a director is more complicated than focusing on what it is about dance that I'm interested in. Also, knowing that I will soon be doing a group piece soon gave me permission to do a solo.

I'm interested in your use of meditation in the work. I recently wrote about watching performance as a meditative practice in response to Andy's 'watching performance as a spiritual act' which was a response to Claudia LaRocco's inspiring piece in the Brooklyn Rail about consciousness. The meditation that I'm doing is partially out of personal need. I've been very interested in Buddhism in the past year. It's been a rough couple years in personal and artistic ways. I had one foot in dance and one foot out. I've been reconnecting to enjoying dance as a way of life. So, it's been a hard couple years and meditation has been what has helped me. I've been secular about it while also studying it and reading. Because it was a practice I was already actively engaged in, I thought I'd see what I would do in the studio with it. It also anchored the solo practice. With solo work, I could get lost in confusion and insecurity, but instead it anchored my process, so that every rehearsal that began with seated meditation and movement improvisation. It was a little container that allowed me to build a practice of being in the studio and not just have that time about creating material. I kind of do meditation in the work. The whole experience for me in meditation has been about canceling out extra noise or my defenses or things that complicate or obscure. The structure of this piece has paralleled that in ways that allow me to take out elements of craft or production, to reduce it to something more direct, simple, clear, less complicated. That has in the last few months of the process been my guiding principle in uncovering the piece. The meditation practice I study is Shambhala. You sit with your eyes open and whenever your mind wanders you say to yourself 'thinking' and saying that puts it in a container with the goal to do that without being upset with yourself. Even getting to the word 'thinking' is amazing. You can get so lost in your thoughts. In this work, people who have seen the showings catch this idea that there is this relationship between the effort to be present and the way we construct language or thoughts to avoid that; that the differences between talking about dancing and then, physically dancing are in some ways parallel to this meditative practice. Sometimes the thinking about it is the doing and sometimes the doing explodes the thinking about it. I'm trying to deal with the relationship between the two and working with text. It's hard to work with text, it's scary. It's one of my biggest anxieties. I keep changing the text even today.

How are you relating the solo form itself? The piece is so much about performing and my personal relationship to dance. So the solo is perfect because I can't hide behind craft and what I've learned is that that is what keeps getting distilled or removed. Anything that feels like traditional choreographic craft ends up feeling too calculated or removed. I started with 'how do I arrive at form with dance.' How can I manifest my interest in movement and the body, in presence, into form. Whenever I try to make movement I've been frustrated and end up cutting it mostly. Your most traditional idea of choreography tends to be what I remove from the work. Rather than define the shape and figure out how to perform it, I'm alone and figuring it out as I do it. I'm committed to making something that is more than just me and my steps. Also, by making a solo for myself, I don't need to negotiate parameters with someone else. I do have a dramaturg. When I have to communicate with Susan it makes it more concerte than when I'm just with myself and with her, she reminds me to be responsible to the ideas I've put out there, that I've spoken.

The New York Times

February 21, 2011

Richard Termine for The New York Times

Harkness Dance Festival: Levi Gonzalez in "Performance Experiment With Furniture," part of this festival at the 92nd Street Y.

Time Out New York

March 22–28, 2007

Dance

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Heaps and bounds

Levi Gonzalez trashes Dance Theater Workshop.
By **Gia Kourlas**

STAND IN THE CORNER
Lewis and Pourazar perform *Clusterfuck.*

Like many of his generation, choreographer Levi Gonzalez professes to relate more to the visual-art world than to that of dance. As such, he has named his latest work *Clusterfuck,* after the disorganized aesthetic of artists like Paul McCarthy and Jason Rhodes. "It's similar to a lot of the ideas that I have about my work, so it just made sense," he explains over lunch in Soho. "We're using a lot of random objects and the idea of messiness. Messiness in the movement, too."

The concept for *Clusterfuck,* which opens Wednesday at Dance Theater Workshop, was initially rooted in the choreographer's interest in artistic and political underground movements, partly as a reaction to his view that, at present, the notion of *underground* is nebulous. "So much has been mainstreamed," Gonzalez, 31, says. "The way politics operates now is really smooth—our image of the world is so controlled. Partly, I was interested in asking whether it's even possible to have an underground movement any longer. But it feels important to me to be able to propose questions outside of the establishment, and I think that's something that art does really well: It creates opportunities to reflect and think of alternatives rather than going with the machine of daily life."

The quartet of dancers (Hristoula Harakas, Isabel Lewis, Kayvon Pourazar and Gonzalez himself) embraces the atmosphere of chaos and disorder—there are piles of trash onstage—yet Gonzalez eventually departed from the idea of making a transparent political work. "During the piece's creation, we had a residency at Lexington Center for the Arts," he recalls. "I was still pushing the idea of politics on the piece, so I asked the dancers to write a political rant. Hristoula asked, 'Why? What does this have to do with the piece?' It was a shifting point for me. I realized that the work didn't have to be overtly political to have all of the ideas that I was interested in. More and more, I've been trying to find some sort of distillation of what performance is."

In some ways, *Clusterfuck* is about Gonzalez's relationship to dance and, specifically, what it means to make a dance, both of which became apparent after an in-progress presentation of the work in October. "My ideas were projected rather than

"I was totally into the triple threat: singer, actor, dancer."

experienced," he says. "What I'm *not* interested in right now is designing something that looks pretty and is separate from the experience of watching. The performers are very much conscious of being watched. I'm trying to create choreography that's less about design and more about a shell for a charged kind of presence."

Gonzalez, who was raised in Los Angeles, was originally intent on a musical-theater career. "I was totally into the triple threat: singer, actor, dancer," he notes with a grin. "I was really into tap, which I still love. It's the idea of a structure that you inhabit. Tap bypasses the whole emotional progression and takes you to a place of pure presence."

He attended an alternative high school where he never once took a multiple-choice test, but learned about postmodern theory and was involved in an interdisciplinary theater project. In the pilot program, Gonzalez and his classmates worked with four artists, including choreographer Tanya Hinkel, on a piece about Emma Goldman, the famed anarchist. "We did research and created a production that toured high schools," he says. "That's when I got really into experimental dance, and I really connected with Tanya Hinkel. She's much more borderline performance art than dance, and I don't know what I would think of her work now—I might consider it a little pretentious. I remember seeing a show of hers in an abandoned brewery that was about the fall of Troy. Women in slips, poking themselves with hairpins and bleeding gold. But there was something in the way that she moved."

Ultimately the experience encouraged him to pursue a degree at CalArts, where he became acquainted with fellow students Luciana Achugar and Maria Hassabi, now fairly prominent New York–based choreographers, before heading East himself in 1997. Gonzalez is grateful for their presence here, especially as he prepares to mount his first full-evening show. "I feel like they're my wiser older sisters," he says, laughing. "Whenever I'm freaking out, they totally know the right thing to say."

Levi Gonzalez presents Clusterfuck *at Dance Theater Workshop Wed 28–Mar 31.*

OFFOFFOFF dance

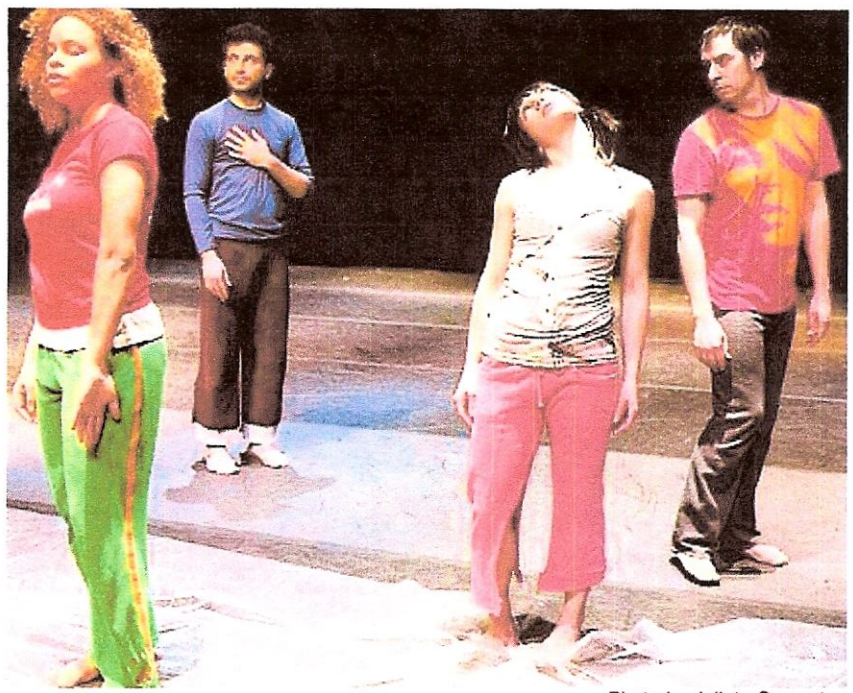

Photo by Julieta Cervantes

Isabel Lewis, Kayvon Pourazar, Hristoula Harakas, Levi Gonzalez

Clusterfuck

Levi Gonzalez' Clusterfuck explores indifference, cultural garbage and random acts of violation and kindness

By QUINN BATSON
Offoffoff.com

"Clusterfuck" is a rare piece of dance that covers the indifference of the world, the scope of Western popular music of the 20th century and the consumer chaos of American culture, and the deep humanity of a small act of charity; Levi Gonzalez manages to both trash the stage and leave everyone feeling better.

LEVI GONZALEZ: CLUSTERFUCK

Choreography by: **Levi Gonzalez**.
Dancers: **Levi Gonzalez, Hristoula Harakas, Isabel Lewis, Kayvon Pourazar**.
Sound design by: **James Lo**.
Lighting design by: **Joe Levasseur**.

SCHEDULE

Dance Theater Workshop
March 28-31, 2007

Gonzalez mines the adage that nothing good comes easily by teasing and irritating the audience for most of the first half of the piece. For the first ten minutes, we are all bathed in bright light and silence, watching the backs of four people facing a wall. Very gradually, sporadic finger snaps and claps break the silence and lead to an intriguing bit of walking dance in odd meters. When the performers finally face us fully in stark light at the front of the stage, it is compelling

and awkward. When sound does eventually come from the speakers, it is not at all soothing and only makes the tension and discomfort deeper. By the time the stage is strewn with random garbage and a sleeping train rider is slowly and casually pickpocketed over the ambient drone of a traveling train, most of the audience is probably wondering if they want to stick around.

Then dancing breaks out, and things get silly. To the most hilariously diverse collection of music snippets from techno and ballads to heavy metal and heavy R & B to country music and cartoon music — if you can imagine it, it's probably there, or coming up in the next two seconds — the four dancers do a funky line dance to whatever comes up, oblivious and joyless.

Misery and discomfort aren't completely forgotten after this comedic break, of course, but at least the mix becomes more palatable. Really strong performances by Gonzalez (looking appropriately worse for wear), Hristoula Harakas, Isabel Lewis and Kayvon Pourazar, and continually interesting sound design by James Lo and lighting by Joe Levasseur make "Clusterfuck" work.

There is a moment, too, where the much sweatier dancers return to the front of the stage to look at the audience in silence again, that feels really connected and human and universal; these four diverse people seemingly become deeply recognizable by everyone in the audience.

. . . dance [is] one of the few environments where nothing is sold but an experience
— *Levi Gonzalez*

The dancers' stumbling through and interacting with garbage onstage is both an element of danger and tension and a comment on American culture. A funny bit with clothes as bondage devices may be comment or comedy. Certainly the ending looks to be going badly for Gonzales, who begins to be harassed and pelted by the other dancers until, in an instant, one of the missiles becomes a random gift and his face lights up. The feel-good ending has an elastic catapult being used to share the love with the audience.

As Gonzalez himself says best, ". . . dance has a special resonance as being one of the few environments where nothing is sold but an experience." "Clusterfuck" is a different experience for everyone, but it feels safe to say that everyone comes away a bit better off for the experience.

THE DANCE ENTHUSIAST

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Gloria McLean, President of the American Dance Guild; Photo: Courtesy of Artist

IMPRESSIONS: Levi Gonzalez's “Hoary” at The Chocolate Factory Theater

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By Sarah Cecilia Bukowski
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Published on November 18, 2024
Photo courtesy of the Chocolate Factory

Conceived and Directed by Levi Gonzalez

Choreographed and Performed by Rebecca Serrell Cyr, Levi Gonzalez and Kayvon Pourazar

Sound Composition and Performance by Senem Pirler

Lighting Design by Madeline Best

Costume and Design Guide jmy james kidd

Additional Music and Music Sources: “Luz de Luna” by Chavela Vargas, “A Child’s Question, August” by PJ Harvey, “The Dancer” by PJ Harvey

***Hoary* is Commissioned and Presented by the Chocolate Factory Theater**

What is the role of place in performance? Place is of course essential, though its role is often incidental. While site-specific performance is certainly nothing new, the genre largely encompasses "alternative" performance spaces like parks, plazas, museums, galleries, and public spaces. Theaters are far less often considered for their site specificity. In fact, theater spaces are often built to promote their unspecificity: the black box, the white box, and the proscenium theater as blank slates of possibility.

Artists, for their part, encounter a divide between site-specific presentations — often one-time or short term engagements — and replicable, site-unspecific presentations where performance is crafted to traverse any number of theatrical settings. These paradigms frame alternative sites as activated places and leave theaters to languish as un-places, vessels waiting to be filled and emptied by the rhythms of any given week's load-in and load-out. The generic space and the portable performance thus become creative assets for the sustainability of both venue and artist, which in turn impacts the viewing public's relationship to and engagement with place.

Kayvon Pourazar in "Hoary" at the Chocolate Factory. Photo courtesy of the Chocolate Factory Theater

The Chocolate Factory Theater disrupts this paradigm by asserting and leaning into its alternative theatrical placeness. While the warehouse space is far from a traditional proscenium theater, it is a dedicated space designed for performance presentation, with theatrical sound, lighting, and stage equipment and modular seating arrangements in its open floor plan. Modular performances spaces are certainly growing in popularity, with multimillion dollar facilities like The Shed and the Perelman Performing Arts Center touting a range of structural possibilities and their material impacts on big-ticket productions and high-paying audiences. As an "artist-founded, artist-led and artist-focused organization," the Chocolate Factory grounds the modular possibilities of their space in sustained, supportive relationships with artists and their creative labor. Each season, 9-10 lead artists and their collaborators benefit from dedicated multi-week, salaried creative residencies along with commissioning funds, equipment, and production support to create work by and for themselves and the space, which they can alter and rearrange to suit their purposes. Performance dates and audience capacity are at the discretion of the artists, and the Chocolate Factory offers tiered ticket pricing ("pay as much as your circumstances allow") for all its presentations. This holistic commissioning and presenting model remains unique among New York City venues and provides a kind of place-based support structure that aims to drive artists' creativity toward an integral sense of theatrical placeness. I'm never quite sure what to expect when I enter the Chocolate Factory; every time it looks and feels entirely different as each artist harnesses and transforms the space as a structural, aesthetic, and atmospheric agent in their work.

Levi Gonzalez in "Hoary" at the Chocolate Factory. Photo courtesy of the Chocolate Factory

The artist Levi Gonzalez is no exception: his diptych "Hoary" inhabits the Chocolate Factory with a pointed attention to place that calls upon human, geological, industrial, and mythological timescales to conjure traces of material and symbolic meaning. Gonzalez and his collaborators voice these intentions explicitly through oration and storytelling, but they just as often communicate implicitly through the interweaving of movement, sound, and objects. The resulting multidimensional journey grounds us in physical place as a departure point for affective places: dark, funny, delightful, jarring, eerie, and transportive.

The work's opening sequences for Gonzalez and Kayvon Pourazar methodically traverse the "pre-stage" spaces of the Chocolate Factory's concrete-floored lobby, prompting the audience to engage with the performance before we even take our seats. Amid the pre-show chatter, we begin to hear a repeated call and response across the room: "Levi!" "Kayvon!" "Levi!" "Kayvon!" A space clears in the crowd as the performers approach and recede from each other, all the while modulating and mirroring the tone, volume, speed, and inflection of their calls. They quiet into an embrace and move a few steps deeper into the space, repeatedly rearranging their bodies into intimate sculptural configurations. This time they modulate posture and tenor as they brace and grapple with combative muscularity and the tenderness of surrender, colliding and breaking apart with audible effort before settling into a warm embrace of recognition.

Kayvon Pourazar in "Hoary" at the Chocolate Factory. Photo courtesy of the Chocolate Factory

Moving ever deeper into the space, the two pause just before the edge of the stage to disrobe and embark on an exploration of the body as place. A whispering soundscape emerges, composed of small noises that hint at enclosure, isolation, distance, and the natural world. In this charged and dreamy air the artists bind, sculpt, and knead their own quivering, undulating flesh in patient acts of recognition, effort, and care. Each ascends slowly from the floor, heels hovering on the edge of levitation, then pick up their neat piles of clothes and shoes and depart. We're left with a lingering sense of knowing them, a sense tinged with the stain of voyeurism and the blush of empathy.

Levi Gonzalez ,Kayvon Pourazarm and Rebecca Serrell Cyr in "Hoary" at the Chocolate Factory. Photo courtesy of the Chocolate Factory

In the unexpected interval we take our seats around the perimeter of the stage floor and wait. And wait. Small whispers and sighs barely ripple the air; miraculously, hardly anyone has their phone out. Clustered in threes and fours facing inward from all sides of the floor, we can see one another clearly—I'm hyperconscious of my notepad — and we're all relieved when the performers reenter, now in full costume and dramatic makeup, the duo turned trio with Rebecca Serrell Cyr. Through a relentless cascade of interlocking scenes, the artists take turns reading stories at a small table with a microphone; by way of introduction Gonzalez weaves a semi-fictional history of the Chocolate Factory's site and structure. He colors images of the place's almost absurdly varied history: sheep grazing at a creek's edge, industrial masons cutting marble in a warehouse factory, artists making experimental performance for the grassroots avant garde. These histories merge into flights of imaginative lore and ghost stories that call attention to presence and absence across time and space. Structural materiality comes to the fore as the performers produce sound with objects and surfaces throughout the space. A symphony of clatters and bangs melds with their rising voices as the detritus of found objects accumulates on stage, only to be unceremoniously cleared as Gonzalez stamps out a persistent two-step and Cyr recites a litany of "once upon a time"s.

Rebecca Serrell Cyr in "Hoary" at the Chocolate Factory. Photo courtesy of the Chocolate Factory

Periods of seeming chaos bring passages of formality into sharp focus. At two key points the performers join palms and reel through a rigorously rhythmic unison dance, first accompanied by the resonant clop of hard-soled heeled shoes and later by the slap of their bare soles to the driving tune of PJ Harvey's "The Dancer." Each time, their two-step builds in complexity, braiding through syncopations with precise control and hurtling momentum, their faces aflame with effort and joy. Rigorous questioning channels through bodies and objects across disparate registers: wordless wails and chants rub against pristine technical and gestural codes as the performers activate objects, surfaces, and each other. In a final sequence they tumble in clouds of raw wool, evoking the ghosts of grazing sheep as their bodies appear and disappear into the matted clumps like talismanic conduits to the land beneath them.

"Hoary" at the Chocolate Factory. Photo courtesy of the Chocolate Factory

With its mythic histories and dreamlike departures, "Hoary" attends to place as an unstable entity constituted by human, animal, material, ecological, and temporal elements. The Chocolate Factory's placeness proves to be a generative point of departure, one that opens the question of place and performance more broadly. Where will we go next?