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Daniel Linehan is onto something with 'Everything'

Olympia-born dancer-choreographer Daniel Linehan, performing in Seattle for the first time since graduating from UW in 2004, brings his 2007 masterpiece, "Not About Everything," to Velocity Dance Center, along with new work. The show repeats Sept. 13-14, 2013.

By Michael Upchurch

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I'll confess I had my doubts.

Olympia-born dancer-choreographer Daniel Linehan's "Not About Everything" consists of Linehan spinning in a tight circle while repeating snippets of text for 30-odd minutes. Ten minutes, yes (that's the length of the YouTube excerpt I saw). Twenty minutes, maybe. But more than half an hour?

As it turns out, "Not About Everything" is a visceral thrill, a sort of minimalist spectacle that confounds expectations and elicits knowing laughs as it pricks holes in every possible approach to existence.

How to describe it?

It's an endurance test, even though Linehan says it's not about endurance. It's cathartic, even though he says it's not about therapy. And it is about everything, even though he says — over and over and over again — that it's not. (He also notes, once, that it's not about whirling dervishes.)

Most of all it's about the intricate, rhythmic intertwining of movement and words, though he voices a caveat about that too. His verbal repetitions, you soon become aware, aren't just repetitions but explorations of how a slight change in word emphasis can shift the whole weight of a phrase. And those phrases' aural texture is doubled throughout the piece as Linehan's live, amplified voice chants in tight synchrony with a sometimes distorted recording of the same text.

The variations in his strictly limited movement are equally exact. Sometimes his spin has a whiplash intensity. Sometimes it's more of a goofy rotating lope. Arm position, head position and facial expression are in continual gradual evolution.

The piece's humor derives in part from Linehan's sense of how taffylike the building blocks of language are. But it also comes from the way the *content* of his text puts him through zany contortions of conscience and self-consciousness. Slowing his spin down slightly to sign a petition in the name of some worthy cause (which varies from show to show), he then admits, as he speeds back up, "I think signing a petition is a pretty limited action — and so is spinning."

In short, this solo — which was created in 2007 and launched Linehan as a dancer-choreographer in Europe where he's lived for the last five years — is full of variety, momentum and surprise ... although Linehan naturally insists, at one point, that it's "not about surprise" either.

“Not About Everything” is preceded by “The Karaoke Dialogues: Seattle Trial,” a work-in-progress set on seven Seattle dancers. Linehan plans to premiere it with his own dance group in Brussels (his home base) in May. But the action onstage at Velocity on Thursday night was polished, tight and not in any way unfinished in feel.

Again, Linehan links word rhythm and body movement until they become one and the same. The texts used include Kafka’s “The Trial” and Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein,” but the dancers don’t “act out” the scenes excerpted. Instead, their movements become the cadences of each word, syllable by syllable.

The result is at the very edge of what some folks might consider dance (the same could be said of “Not About Everything”). At times it seems more like a hieroglyphically complicated body semaphore. But it has rigor, verve and drama to it. And it’s enhanced by video-projected, recorded text that also taps deeply into the quirks of verbal delivery — every stutter, every word-spill, every “uh.”

Linehan, as one commenter on his online videos remarks, is definitely “onto something.” Grab this chance to see him while you can.

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