



UAPRESENTS STUDENT CRITIC PROGRAM

Paul Taylor Dance Company

Review by Alysia Smith

The Paul Taylor Dance Company graced the Centennial Hall stage with their presence on November 20, 2010. The legendary dance company was founded by Paul Taylor, an icon in modern dance. Taylor is credited with being a part of one of the very (and I mean *very*) elite groups that created modern dance, which some tribute as America's first native art form. His choreography has become famous worldwide for reflecting the simplicity of human movement and behavior while incorporating the sometimes outlandish body strength and movements that modern dance is known for.

This performance of PTDC was no exception to the raw power that is modern dance. The set opened with a more classically-based piece, "Arden Court". "Arden Court" is set to *Symphonies Nos. 1, 3, 5, 7, 8* by William Boyce and is the sheer definition of power and physical strength. Imagine the slightly naughty outbackers from "The Thunder from Down Under" wearing only light blue tights and jumping (yes, literally jumping) all over the stage. Their muscular arms flex every time they land and every girl's heart in the audience leaps when a male dancer grabs a female by the waist and throws her up in the air like a ragdoll. This was a story of courting, of love, and of the constant attempt to impress the opposite sex without regard to one's current relationship status. The PTDC male dancers were always jumping, leaping, running, throwing, catching, constantly doing *something* that made me sore just watching. This piece provided a great opening to the show but was not reflective of what the rest of the performance would be like.

The entire thing was quite eclectic, actually. From "Arden Court" to "The Word" to "Black Tuesday", each piece told a different story of the human experience and invoked different trains of thought from the audience. Although each piece seemed to be life-changing, the next went in a totally different direction and made it seem impossible that life could be lived any other way than what was being shown onstage in that moment.

Let's take "The Word", for example. A brief intermission after "Arden Court" gave the audience time to absorb what they had just seen and prepare themselves for the next piece. Then, when the lights dimmed, a line of dancers wearing white dress shirts and ties was lit. Immediately the audience was transported into a world of struggle as the dancers trudged across the stage lugging a heavy load on their backs. Later the appearance of a nude dancer intensified the conflict when she pushed dancers over, invoked intimidation by pacing around them, and found other sneaky ways to daunt the trudgers. The 'eternal' conflict really did seem to go on for eternity, as the dancers put the audience in their shoes (or lack thereof, as it was a modern dance performance). What do you do when you keep going in circles and can't seem to stay upright? You keep going. The dancers, no matter the struggle, never stayed on the ground. This piece characterized the outrageous movements and 'statements' (i.e. a completely nude dancer) that modern dance is based on. The

dancers' bodies were contorted and twisted into non-traditional positions throughout the entire piece whether they were standing on both feet, jumping in the air, or lying on the ground.

So far we've seen the human need to constantly impress others, and the perpetual struggle against (metaphorically) unseen forces. What else did Paul Taylor choose to share with this Tucson crowd? Resiliency. The last piece, "Black Tuesday", used music recordings and costume inspirations from the Great Depression. Many different songs were used, giving each dancer special attention in a solo or a small group. The crowd favorite was the "pregnant" dancer, who wanted someone to be her man. Each song told a different story, whether it was that there's "no depression in love", or that women were pushed to new lows in a time when no one could afford to demand respect from others. Some were tragic and some were comical, but each one took the audience deeper into the life of the Depression. When learning about the Depression in junior high history class, I had to write a story about a specific family who had been affected by the stock market crash. I thought I knew how life would have been then, but I had no idea until I watched it through the eyes of Paul Taylor. Born in 1930, Taylor was thrust into a world where nothing was predictable. He undoubtedly saw how the Depression had affected his parents and that very inspiration was clear in "Black Tuesday". The audience had the most fun with this piece, and rightly so. Instead of telling of a constant struggle, Taylor chose to show the hope and joy that is the less-often told story of the Great Depression.

All in all, the Paul Taylor Dance Company wowed the arts community of Tucson. Friends of mine, including dancers and choreographers, posted on Facebook for the next four to five days things like, "I'm still on my high from watching the Paul Taylor Dance Company perform!" PTDC generally does not tour, and it is even rarer they stop in a city that is not a major art hub such as L.A. For this reason, it is very unlikely they will grace a Tucson stage again anytime soon; this was a show not to be missed. Anyone with an existential bone in their body can draw truth, light, and inspiration from the choreography and storytelling of Paul Taylor, and anyone without those inclinations can appreciate the sheer power and physical authority the dancers demand when they are onstage.