

Richard Move at Jacob's Pillow

by Theodore Bale
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Right now **Richard Move** is best known across America for his hokey, choreographic satire for Amy Sedaris and her gang in the movie *Strangers With Candy*. Before that, he impressed thousands of fans in the U.S. and Europe with his post-modern vaudeville revue starring himself as the legendary Martha Graham. And before that, he was letting his body groove to the music at a wide assortment of downtown New York clubs, winning plenty of attention as a first-class go-go dancer.

What many people outside of New York or the major international dance festivals don't know is that Move has become a formidable choreographer. He didn't dance in his latest show, **MoveOpolis!**, seen last week at the prestigious Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in Becket, Massachusetts. And while there were ironic laughs to be enjoyed here and there, the program featured mostly non-narrative dances set to an unusual assortment of music, from Verdi to Trance from DJ Savage. With MoveOpolis!, this exciting young choreographer places himself closer to New York's downtown dance scene. Why not? It's where Move has based his explorations for many years. Now one shouldn't think of his efforts as distinctly contrary to the work of other New York choreographers such as Christopher Elam, Neil Greenberg, Donna Uchizono, or even the recent work of Karole Armitage.'

Always with a keen interest in dance history, his current language contains plenty of references to classical ballet and the classic modern dance of Germany and America, if not many of the Judson Church choreographers of the 1960s. At one point dancer Kristen Irby took a pose with her torso and hips tilted, her hands as if in the gesture of playing a set of bongos. With her hair swaying side to side, she looked very much like an old postcard of Dore Hoyer performing a work by Mary Wigman. Move organizes his events according to traditional theatrical formats, providing an arc that usually results in a grand finale. In this way it's very satisfying. What was strange was the context for each work. There were many dark moments that provoked strong emotion in the viewer, particularly in the program's final work, the world premiere of *Toward the Delights of the Exquisite Corpse*.

The use of Verdi in the opening dance (*Verdi for Three*) was not incongruous in say, the method of director Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who used Verdi often in his films for melodramatic impact. Rather, Move used Verdi for his inescapable energy and grandeur. After a few athletic episodes of running, jumping and inspired partnering, the three dancers performed a long series of unison gestures. The dancers made fists, looking like they might be saying the pledge of allegiance, or clasped their palms together at the heart in the traditional gesture known as "anjali mudra." It was strikingly simple and quite moving, without the release of a happy ending.'

The solo *Lust* followed, an excerpt from the evening-length *Seven Deadly Sins* commissioned by Jacob's Pillow in 2001. Move knows and loves house music from his days as a go-go boy. Here he used it to create a timeless dimension in which a woman, transfixed, is at odds with the impulses of her own body. Catherine Cabeen gave this extraordinary dance a wonderfully emphatic interpretation, her face either pained or ecstatic, her body in a continual balance interrupted by inexplicable incidents that seemed to surprise even her: mouth gaping, hands shaking and reaching upward, her entire torso quivering as the dance faded into darkness.

A straightforward solo from Miguel Anaya, wearing simple pants and a little gold necklace, was set to Cheb Khaled's rousing Arabic melodies. Originally from a multimedia opera by Wendall Harrington based on a fable from the Bhagavad-Gita (*Arjuna's Dilemma*), the dance did not seem to contain any story. The movement was crisp and clear, and delivered with a slight adagio that suggested rather that the viewer should contemplate each phrase for its intrinsic beauty.'

Toward the Delights of the Exquisite Corpse formed the entire second half of the program, a psychedelic and vital dance that is as perplexing as it is mesmerizing. It's also a brilliant collaboration with the legendary video artist Charles Atlas, who provided a gorgeous wash of images relating to the body, from Hollywood film stills (Cleopatra) to layered fragments of extreme color. Hilton Als' sound score included a speech from a man identifying himself only as a "crazy, evil nigger" and suggesting that gay men need to think more about becoming guerillas. The woman sitting in front of me started to go ballistic at the lunacy of this idea. "...They can't really match with Afghani or PLO guerillas," he added before the dance was on to its next purpose. Two men performed a duet in silvery, space-suit costumes to the text, "you can't accomplish anything." Then came perhaps the most difficult moment: two women in a jumpy, frenetic duet while some unidentified girl group from the 1960s sang the lyric, "he hit me, and it felt like a kiss." The energy in the house changed, people seemed on the edge of their seats. One male dancer wore a blindfold while another man positioned his obedient body in a series of mundane poses. After a series of interlacing duets, I was dizzy at this wonderful circus of images, so reminiscent of a film by one of the Kuchar brothers. The dancers spun like Dervishes, and the piece ended with a simple circle dance for the quartet.'