

Wanda's Picks October 2017

4th Annual PUSH Festival Review

It was the final day of Raissa Simpson's PUSH Dance Festival, the 4th Annual and between the afternoon and evening programs we walked over to the park across the street where there was a community garden and lots of fun activities for kids and those of us who are kids at heart.

Over the four years, PUSH Festival has featured superb work and audiences are enthusiastic. I was especially looking forward to Simpson's Mothership Part 2 and Halifu Osumare, Ph.D.'s ebo to Oya, warrior deity who is a symbol for change and transformation. Recently, Bay Area residents heard Oya's husband, Shango's voice rumbling—the booming sound precursor to flashing fingers of light parting the skies. It was an amazing show, better than the best July 4th program—afterward huge rain drops drenched all who stood outside to watch.

Osumare says of the new work, “In The Eye of the Storm” (2017), “We are in the eye of a national and international storm, and the crisis can only be survived in community with others. The forces causing the storm are external and internal to the community, and survival means growing spiritually. Oya is the Yoruba warrior deity of the Winds of Change, and with her husband Shango she promotes social justice. Oya brings the storm but also shows the community the way out, and as a result people grow. This dance is dedicated to Oya-Yansa, and was originally choreographed for 25th anniversary of the Sacramento State's Sacramento/Black Art of Dance, founded by Dr. Linda Goodrich.”



“In the

Eye of the Storm” ended part one of the PUSH Festival Program A. Nothing could follow the 13-minute, 8 member journey that took the community across the water where we shape-shifted then regrouped (smile). The company performed several vignettes simultaneously. I wondered about the character reading Carter G. Woodson’s “Miseducation of the Negro,” while another character dressed in hijab walked disengaged to and fro. At one point all the dancers assembled and tossed possessions onto a sheet which was then tied together and removed. Perhaps they were “putting away childish things.” Ayo Walker’s “Oya,” has a solo and then departs, later after the cleansing ceremony where the characters see each other and come together, she returns dressed in a gorgeous gown with sword(s) and crown.

Osumare’s work stylistically pulled from her facility with African-derived dance styles and reflected the migration patterns of African Diaspora people from West Africa to Americas—hip hop culture an element central to the work musically and tangibly. Her company was outstanding in its execution. Missing from the landscape was the rainbow—sign that the storm has passed. I learned later that in its premiere in Sacramento, the work had a multimedia enhancement that showed Oya-Yansa in all her magnificence.

“Accredit,” choreography and performance by Katerina Wong was set in St. Louis against a back drop of a high school there, Normandy High School. First we see the outside of the school. Later we see a child dancing on film, as Wong dances on stage. Later I learn that Wong taught a class at the school. The way the cinematography starts large, then telescopes in, shows how illusive and artificial the microcosm is to the macrocosm. There is really no separation between Normandy and Oakland, Normandy and San Francisco, Normandy and other municipalities where children like this child dancing are deprived a fair chance. I wonder how many in the audience know the story Wong and this child filmed, dance. The story at Normandy is one of equity and access, public education’s failure and a community trapped in structural inequity. I knew the story immediately as the camera moved in and I see the name of the high school. I remember the excellent story I’d listened to and then read the transcript from NPR’s “This American Life: [The Problem We All Live With](#)” (July 31, 2015). It was rebroadcast in February this year. The title, “The Problem We All Live With” is taken from the [Norman Rockwell painting](#) (1964) of Ruby Bridges, and this story also looks at integration. Funny, the Obama’s hang Rockwell’s painting at the White House.

Nikole Hannah-Jones, black journalist, juxtaposes her experience in public school to her investigation into the two Fergusons: one where children excel academically, the other where they fail: Normandy School District. Separate is still unequal.

Normandy School District in Normandy, Missouri, on the border of Ferguson, Missouri, is the same school district where Michael Brown lived. This school district legally deprived black children of equal education, and knowingly allowed children to graduate without adequate skills.

Katerina Wong’s “Accredit” recalls the travesty which persists to date. Black parents who protested and asked that their children be permitted to attend a better school, had to get a court order which was later rescinded, because the white parents at the alternative predominately white public school protested.

Kendra Kimbrough Barnes's excerpt of "In the Meantime," is a beautiful meditation on the color pink, breast cancer and Black women. I hadn't seen it in a while, yet I remembered it. It's not every day that a choreographer interrogates breast cancer, especially "parabens" and why this chemical is still in cosmetics, including lotions and deodorants when parabens are in cancer cells. The work has monologues, solo dance pieces, and larger company work. Sunday the dancers were: Clairemonica Figueroa (scholar, who narrates and gives us facts); Marianna Hester (hummingbird); Yeni Lucero (matriarch); Patricia Ong (Sister #1); Meagan Wells (Sister #2). The entire piece will be a part of KKDE's season at the Laney College's Odell Johnson Theatre, 900 Fallon Street, Oct. 28, 7:30 p.m. and Oct. 29, 4 p.m. Visit kkde.net or call 510.560.KKDE (5533).