

Dorfman embraces the new at homecoming show

By: **ROBERT JOHNSON** | October 31, 2014

Nostalgia was in the air when the Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company appeared on Sunday in the Bickford Theatre of the Morris Museum in Morris Township. The company made its debut there in 1982, and this return was billed as a “homecoming.”

During intermission, Dorfman thanked the people who helped her launch the troupe, but she didn’t linger over reminiscences. Soon it was back to the future with a performance of the choreographer’s “Interior Designs.” A visually arresting piece that bathes the auditorium in projections, “Interior Designs” was created last year, employing “video mapping” technology that didn’t exist in 1982. It would have been interesting to see one of the dances from the company’s inaugural season, but like most creative artists Dorfman is more interested in where she’s going than in where she’s been. The oldest piece on the program, “Love Suite Love,” had its premiere on the Bickford stage in 1992.

Created in 1995, Doug Elkins’ “Narcoleptic Lovers” looks perennially fresh. The subject — quarreling and disaffected lovers — clearly has staying power, but what really makes this dance seem youthful is its loopy eclecticism. Viewers may laugh ruefully as Louie Marin and Katlyn Waldo feint and kick to the “ding” of a boxing bell, but a dance in which a tiger-claw attack mixes it up with classic modern symmetries, ballet steps and the sass of R&B is a dance that is ultimately about co-existence and not competition. “Narcoleptic Lovers” represents a joyful moment when cultural boundaries fell as decisively as the Berlin Wall, giving us permission to listen to Mozart AND Sinéad O’Conner. In the opening duet, Ae-Soon Kim and Brandon Jones were wonderfully attuned.



Members of the Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company, in “Interior Designs.” Photo by Paula Lobo

In “Love Suite Love,” set to music by Patsy Cline, Dorfman supplies her heartsick characters with pillows to which they can confide their sorrows. While cushioning hard falls and disappointments, these props also allow her to create colorful designs by sandwiching dancers and pillows together.

When they aren’t daydreaming, the cast goes to the movies, where their hands and their partners have a tendency to wander. Dorfman doesn’t take their personal tragedies too seriously, however. The final tableau ascends like a human pyramid, suggesting our common aspirations and — typically for Dorfman — offering a reassuring vision of community.

“Interior Designs” is choreographed on a grander scale, with more dancers, more effects and an ambitious plan that takes the action right to the audience in their seats. Parts of this dance exhibit a dazzling ingenuity, like the scene in which dancers criss-cross the stage with arms outspread, forming a grid that suggests a street map complete with bustling traffic. Yet even a design like this delivers a message about our condition, saying: We’re all in this together.