

Dancing Like Nobody Is Watching

-- A Review of Student Concert 2002

Hongfei Guo (guo@cs.wisc.edu)

What is the ultimate purpose of dancing? To entertain the audience or to entertain oneself? Put it another way, to cater the aesthetic standard of the audience or to express oneself? I love aesthetic dances, those that are strictly formatted and performed by strictly trained dancers, such as Chinese classic and folk dances, as well as Ballet. The 2002 student concert defiantly does not belong to this category; however, it touched me by its passion, boldness, and originality.

Take off is a solo by Joana Dacosta, which expressed the theme of freedom. The background was a blue sky with casual clouds, projected in a shaking way. Contrast to it, the dancer was in a bright red costume. The settings together create an atmosphere of relaxation. Using lots of floor movement, and different rhythms, the dancer expressed strong feelings (or moods) in a natural way. -There is no disguise; this is I, myself.

Hardening is a video work piece. Throughout the video, there was no music; instead there was only natural noise. Two worlds were explored: one was a close and static world in a room, where the camera randomly focused on some objects, the blinds or her hands; while the other was the outside dynamic world, where a young girl was dancing in the crowd. She immersed in the dancing; nobody stopped to watch. I felt lonely from watching this piece.

Untitled is another interesting piece. The "music" of this dance was a lecturing about how to be a happy person. Different patterns of lighting were used to divide

the stage and to indicate the mood. The dancer tried to translate the lecture into body language. Maybe because it was a lecture, the dance looked a little bit overstretched. But I think it was a good experiment of combining reciting, lighting, and dancing components together.

The last but not least piece, *Sinew*, characterized by full of imagination, was one of my favorites. Meghan McCoy was the choreographer and dancer. She wore cat (or whatever) like makeup and black tights. With the strong drum rhythm, Meghan showed a modern American young girl --energetic, cool, and passionate. She was angry, she was suspicious, she was self-satisfied, she was happy. -- She danced just like nobody was watching.

I think the origin of dancing was a way to better communicate by exaggerating the body gestures. However, as dancing developed into a refined art form, it tends to be extremely aesthetic, ballet is one of such examples. The dancer's character as an individual got submerged in the strict dance format. On the opposite, modern dance emphasizes individual experience. It pushes the dance back towards the nature. Yet those two trends do not conflict with each other. Instead, they complement each other, and benefit from each other.

The student concert also illustrates this: personal experience, and individual character bring life to a dance, yet all the other components: lighting, background, stage space usage, different rhythms, as well as good training etc., still play important roles in a dance. They make it possible to express such rich feelings in a beautiful and elegant dance form.