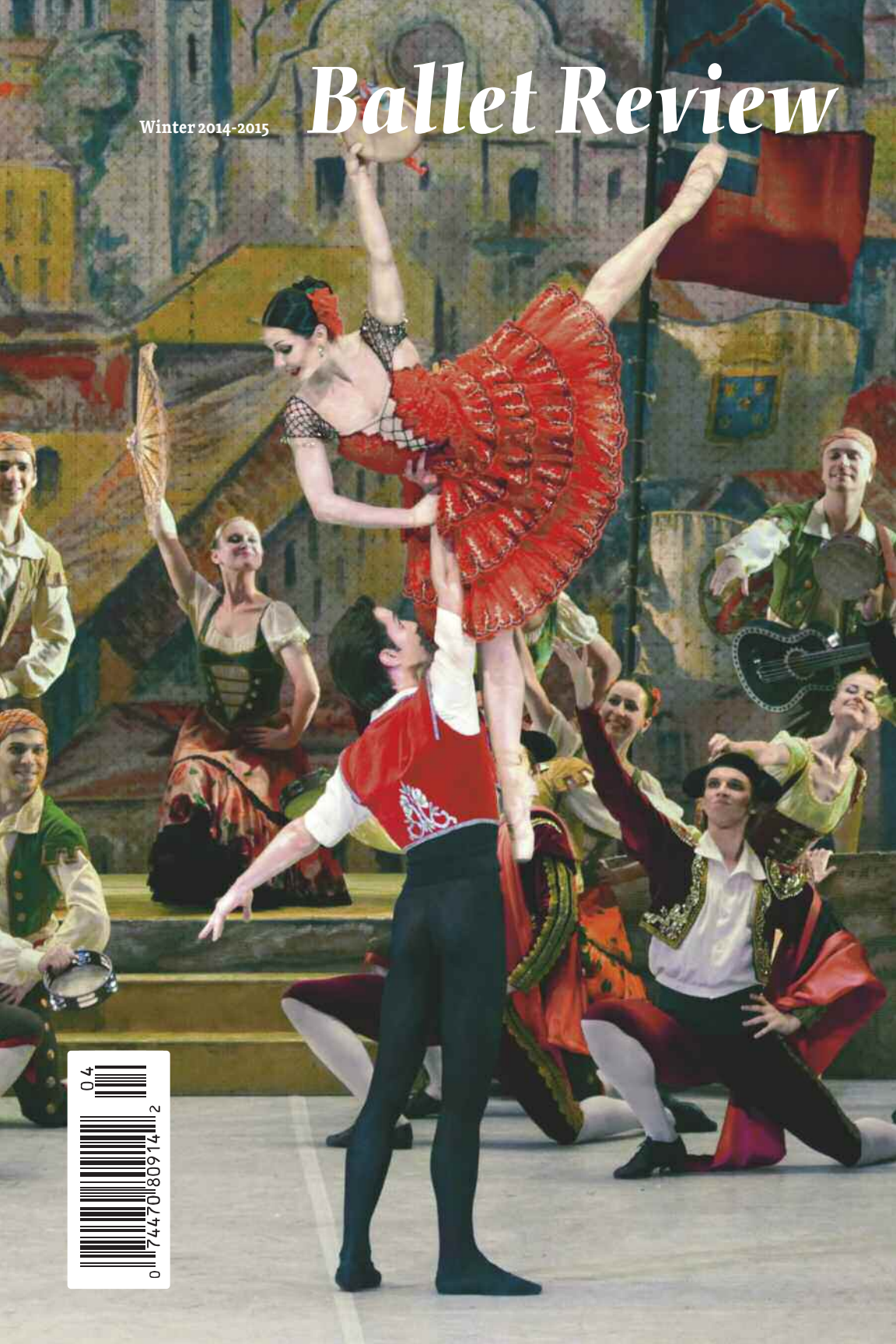


Winter 2014-2015

Ballet Review



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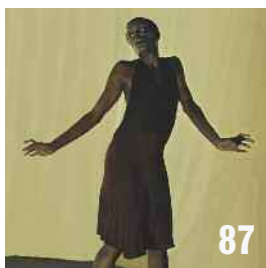
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- 4 Barbara Palfy – George Dorris
- 5 Birmingham – David Mead
- 7 Berlin – Darrell Wilkins
- 10 Sarasota/Miami – Leigh Witchel
- 13 New York – Susanna Sloat
- 14 Toronto – Gary Smith
- 15 New York – Karen Greenspan
- 17 Stuttgart – Gary Smith
- 18 Boston – Jeffrey Gantz
- 20 Toronto – Gary Smith
- 22 Boston – Jeffrey Gantz
- 24 Isle of Wight – Gary Smith
- 26 New York – Karen Greenspan
- 28 Washington, D. C. – Lisa Traiger
- 29 Zurich – Renée E. D’Aoust
- 31 Letter to the Editor – Edward Villella
Joel Lobenthal
- 32 A Conversation with Vida Brown
Robert Withers
- 42 Flamenco New York
Henry Danton
- 50 In Defense of Petipa
Sophie Flack
- 59 Boston at Fifty
Susanna Sloat
- 64 From Morocco to Armenia
Robert Greskovic
- 66 Elizaveta Pavlovna Gerdt
Joseph Houseal
- 74 A Conversation with Molissa Fenley
Jay Rogoff
- 78 City Ballet Summer
Alexandra Villarreal
- 85 YAGP 2014
Photographs by Tom Brazil
- 87 Danspace Project 2013-2014
Susanna Sloat
- 94 Inside Out
Jay Rogoff
- 102 Hot Diggity
- 106 London Reporter – Clement Crisp
- 109 Margot Fonteyn – George Jackson
- 110 Music on Disc – George Dorris

New York

Karen Greenspan

ZviDance's local 2014 season at New York Live Arts showcased *Surveillance*, a collaborative work reflecting on how pervasive, embedded surveillance has altered our society. Some of the issues the piece raises are how a society changes when it submits to constant monitoring, how those empowered with the task of screening are transformed, what happens to the mountains of data collected on each of us.

This hour-long, poignant, and mindful reflection on the enormous, unseen surveillance network that underpins life in America today

is a collaborative effort of Zvi Gotheiner and his dancers along with frequent co-creator Scott Killian, who composed a high energy, original score for the piece. Hertog Nadler's evocative visual projections, animations by Uri Hallel, and media programming by Jon Bremmer provide a technological presence that was essential to the dance.

Gotheiner shared with me that the piece had been brewing for four years. However, raising the funds to produce a work requiring this level of technology proved to be a challenge. Gotheiner remarked that the international collaboration that enabled the creation of the piece involving Amsterdam-based visual artists, an Israel-based animator, and a media programmer in New York City could not have even happened ten years ago because the technology for sending such large electronic files did not yet exist.

Thanks to a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, artistic residencies at Kaatsbaan International Dance Center and the Catskill Mountain Foundation provided a necessary incubation period and the space to break ground – generating concepts, material, and movement that would eventually be shaped into *Surveillance*.

The dance opens as the eight dancers, provocatively clad in various undergarment combinations and black dress socks, each perform very sensual and personal movement explorations standing downstage in a row that stretches across the stage. At various points in their phrases, they retreat backward while choking and gasping for air. Then they return to the front of the stage and resume their individual movement sequences. It is as if the audience is the surveillance camera with visual access to material that should be private. Gotheiner revealed that this opening progression was a warm-up ritual they performed to begin each rehearsal. Dubbed “the red-light line,” by the dancers, Gotheiner used it as an

effective means to engage the audience members and pull them into the piece.

Once the initial tableau dissolves, the dancers reenter the stage with everyday clothing through which we can see the undergarments. Designed by MaryJo Mecca, the costumes serve the dance and the dancers well, reinforcing the theme of what must be revealed versus what may remain private.

The piece is punctuated by three separate “search” sequences. During the “First Search,” the dancers line up and undergo a prodding and manipulating body search routine performed by a screener. Each dancer has his/her own idiosyncratic response to submitting to this inconvenient invasion of personal privacy. During the “Second Search,” the screener is entirely naked and blind (blindfolded), perversely attempting to search the fully clothed, seeing (yet still submissive) subject. In the “Third Search,” the dancers line up and pro-



Zvi Gotheiner's *Surveillance*.

Photo: Stephen Dallas Hens, ZviDance

ceed to perform the screening ritual on themselves. The sequence provides a well-drawn statement on how the system has insidiously reformed our society's thinking, expectations, and behavior.

A memorable scene includes a colorful grid filled with descriptive words, or labels, projected on the screen that served as the backdrop of the stage. The dancers individually walk forward announcing one or more labels, as if categorizing themselves, in this theatri-

cal example of how the surveillance bureaucracy, obsessed with data collection, sorts humans into sometimes absurd categories.

In several sections, some of the onstage dancers use cameras to record the other dancers who are performing with the video-recorded images of their dancing projected on the screen behind them. At times the cameras are turned on the audience, causing images of the audience to be projected on the screen. The recording theme is explored until finally Tyner Dumortier performs a pitiful and chilling solo wearing a metal frame with four spokes, or arms, each holding a camera at the end. The dancer appears imprisoned in this camera contraption while his exquisite human form is reshaped into a strange, deformed mutation.

A stunning duet performed by Alex Biegelson and Tyner Dumortier, with their well-matched muscular physicality, explores beautiful lines and rhythmic weight shifts while displaying powerful control as the dancers accepted each other's weight. This cool and haunting beauty is followed by and contrasted with Chelsea Ainsworth and Todd Allen dancing a duet sizzling with electricity. The sparks fly as their bodies literally bounce off each other in a sometimes violent physicalization of a couple driven by their physical co-dependence.

Throughout the work the dancers exude a dramatic intensity as they carve through space with super-charged energy. Often the movements are developed from a rhythmic phrase. ZviDance members are fluent in both athletic, technical movement, as well as dramatic or character-initiated movement, displaying a wide range in their rich and exuberant performance of the piece. The inspired choreography and these capable dancers are free of predictable signature and style. The dancers simply move and the choreography speaks.

Projections, of floor plans and fire escape stairwells, on the screen behind the dancers and on the white flooring, resemble surveillance monitors, creating an edgy sense of being watched and monitored. At the end of the

piece, after the dancers have exited the stage, the dancers' shadows lined up in a row are projected onto the white floor in a subtle reference to the permanent residue of collected information that remains even after we are gone.

Zvi Gotheiner's *Surveillance* is a thoughtful, challenging, provocative dance with heightened visual, musical, and kinetic qualities that grab and hold you from start to finish. It doesn't get better than that, and I wouldn't miss an opportunity to see ZviDance perform Gotheiner's work – for the world.