HILARY EASTON BLOGS ABOUT SORRY I MISSED YOUR SHOW!

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Check out Hilary's full entry with images here: http://gibneydance.org/blog/

I was honored and delighted to be asked by Dance/NYC and Gibney Dance to be the artist for the January, 2011 Sorry I Missed Your Show! (SIMYS). The focus of the presentation was my latest work, Light and Shade, an evening-length duet for Emily Pope-Blackman and Michael Ingle, with music by Mike Rugnetta and lighting by Kathy Kaufmann, which premiered in October at Baryshnikov Arts Center. Light and Shade is a real artistic departure for me, which made it all the more interesting to discuss and reflect upon, now with a little distance from its creation. I was asked to choose my own moderator for the event, and I immediately thought of Brian Rogers. Brian, the Artistic Director of The Chocolate Factory and a terrific artist in his own right, was an essential sounding board and source of encouragement throughout the process: he and I had discussed my plans for the dance in the summer of 2009 before I even began rehearsing it, and he attended rehearsals and the opening night of the show, giving support and insightful comments along the way. Mensch that he is, Brian agreed to facilitate the SIMYS event immediately, and I felt so lucky to have him there to discuss the work with me once again.

Light and Shade is an intensely quiet, focused work, with a kind of hush, asking the audience to "lean in" to it, rather than doing much to display itself. It uses the presence of Emily and Michael, their distance and proximity to each other, their focus and awareness of themselves and the audience, as the way to convey much about their relationship. In this way and others, Light and Shade highlights detail and intimacy in a very purposeful way. For SIMYS, we decided to show a few short clips of other examples of other recent work, examining how those earlier dances led to Light and Shade. We thought that sharing some context for how it developed could provide a unique window for those in attendance.

Brian steered the conversation to Light and Shade and the ways in which it is a departure from my prior way of working. Instead of creating a scenario that in some ways explicates the dance's ideas for the audience (as Brian put it, using the more theatrical conceits of spectacle), I began with the expectation that the audience would to come to it, rather than it coming to them. This meant very purposefully not illustrating or editorializing with the choreography, performance direction, score, lighting design, or Madeleine Walach's costumes. My collaborators and I kept to a rigorous plan of not determining what the audience would feel, instead creating a situation where we could "be the thing" and the audience would observe that and come to their own conclusions. The fourth wall, which I always see as somewhat fungible in my work was even more sporadically present in Light and Shade. I shared with the SIMYS attendees that I would often say in rehearsal "we're not trying to create no options for viewing the piece, we're looking to create many options".

One SIMYS attendee asked what the audience reaction has been to the work. My honest reply was that I don't think Light and Shade is a work for everyone, but that the response has been truly gratifying....I have received quite a range of in-depth emails from people who have seen the work and wished to share their interpretations with me. Light and Shade is, as another SIMYS attendee remarked, a kind of "tabula rasa" for the ideas and experiences of those who encounter it, fostering much room for a wide range of conclusions and understandings.

Having the chance to parse apart Light and Shade with Brian and the SIMYS audience was an inspiring experience. I am now preparing to return to the studio to begin something new, and having a chance to reflect on past work helps my own process immeasurably. It was a pleasure to share my experiences with such a bright and attentive group of people. I am tremendously grateful to Brian and the intelligence and insight he brought to the conversation, as well as to the marvelous Gina Gibney and her staff at Gibney Dance; along with Lane Harwell, Executive Director at Dance/NYC and Lacey Althouse, Program Associate. As Lane expressed it, the event "felt like family."

_Hilary Easton