

San Francisco Chronicle

Dance Review

Zaccho dancers slip through time in Yerba Buena show

Rachel Howard, Chronicle Dance Correspondent

Tuesday, August 19, 2008



Joanna Haigood has staged dances off the side of the Ferry Building clock tower and from the rafters at San Francisco International Airport. By comparison, the site of her new "The Shifting Cornerstone," at the corner of Mission and Third streets, might seem pedestrian. But on Saturday afternoon, her vision was not lost on passersby as Amara Tabor-Smith, dressed in long skirts and jangling a set of rusty keys like a ghost of SoMa past, lunged atop the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts' corner edifice.

"It's beautiful!" a man shouted from his Ford F-150 truck.

As it turns out, this crammed slice of sidewalk - anxious ushers keep onlookers from stepping off the curb and in front of speeding cabs - is the best location for Haigood's work. It pushes her historically informed hauntings right into the stream of the present, which is what her Zaccho Dance Theatre is all about.

"The Shifting Cornerstone" - presented by the WestWave Dance Festival and YBCA, and repeating this Saturday and Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. in continuous half-hour loops - is not Haigood's most spectacular or outwardly ambitious installation. Yet it achieves the kind of natural, thought-provoking interaction with its surroundings that most site-specific artists strive for in vain.

On Saturday, giggling children climbed the YBCA's steps while Sheila Lopez, dressed in fedora and glued-on bushy eyebrows, turned a giant metal frame mounted on wheels. Later, Paul Benney, in workman's boots and cap, danced a solo with a planter box of tall grass, a nod to the land's marshy past. His sweet, modestly sweeping movements focused attention onto a lone weed inches away, struggling up from a crack in the slick stone walkways.

As usual, the props - like that box of grass with handles - are designed by Haigood collaborator Wayne Campbell. My favorite among his contributions is his transformation of the metal display cases for YBCA posters, which he's replaced with photographs of "The Shifting Cornerstone's" characters in performance on site. The posters inside the posters are also of "The Shifting Cornerstone," and presumably the posters inside those posters inside those posters, too - an eerie echoing of the past's infinite regression.

The sound installation by Shamsher Virk ends with a heartwarming little swell of symphonic music for a short climax in which all the characters come together. The actor-dancers, who perform in alternating casts, are paragons of focus: Robert Henry Johnson is a convincingly grizzled hotel resident; Raissa Simpson, Guy Brenner and Dwayne Worthington all move through the bustling city crowds with ghostly remove.

The measure of "The Shifting Cornerstone's" success, though, is how porously it mixes with the now. During the first performance I witnessed, a man in stained sweats and a dirty cap pushed a dolly stacked head-high with folding chairs. Was he a performer? Not exactly. But he could have been Johnson's weary double, and he passed through like an equal apparition, oblivious to the busy life around him. Time collapsed.

Zaccho Dance Theatre:

"The Shifting Cornerstone" repeats in half-hour loops noon-5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Southwest corner of Mission and Third streets, San Francisco. Free. (415) 978-2787, www.ybca.org.

E-mail Rachel Howard at datebook@sfchronicle.com.

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/08/19/DDEG12CSOP.DTL>

This article appeared on page **E - 1** of the San Francisco Chronicle

[© 2008 Hearst Communications Inc.](http://www.hearst.com)