
REVIEW: Jane Franklin Dance's 'EyeSoar' at Theatre on the Run

EyeSoar

Jane Franklin Dance

Theatre on the Run

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By Nanda Srikantaiah



It took a minute to find the entrance to Theatre on the Run in Arlington, Va. The main door of the bright yellow building was closed, so performance goers had to walk around the corner to an entrance on South Oakland Street, faced by a quiet parking lot and adjacent to an auto shop and a craft brewery. In the midst of these neighbors, Theatre on the Run is colorful, whimsical, and slightly incongruous. Yet it is precisely this incongruity in the neighborhood that inspired the title piece of Jane Franklin Dance Company's "EyeSoar," a preview of which was performed on Saturday, November 10 as part of a mixed repertory program of works.

Jane Franklin Dance, an Arlington, Va.-based contemporary dance company known for its mixed media and interactive collaborations, took its audience out of the theater and into its local surroundings with "EyeSoar," which was choreographed by Franklin. Short film clips by Franklin, Denaise Seals, and Becca Weiss depicted the performers leaving the studio and engaging with local businesses, passers-by, and dogs at a dog park. Consistent with a recent movement in the arts in the United States known as "creative placemaking," "EyeSoar"

illustrated and engaged with its surroundings, capturing the character of the neighborhood through movement. It's a tricky premise — how do you “dance” a building, a parking lot, a night at the brewery?

The company shined when portraying inanimate surroundings. At one point, the dancers gave life to a parking lot by forming a vertical line with their bodies and hitting the floor in unison, evoking the heaviness of a line of cars. Later, they trotted and picked up their knees as matching video depicted the dancers running down a set of concrete stairs. At the brewery, a background video showed the dancers filling their beer glasses and enjoying a drink at the bar. On stage, the dancers' limbs twisted and they hooked their arms and swayed, depicting with their bodies the effect of the drink not shown on the screen. The interspersed video clips of these stories provided context to the choreography, but the opposite was also true — the dance provided context to these otherwise ordinary places and activities.

Although “EyeSoar” was the headlining piece for Saturday's show, it was not the highlight. The show opened with “Coddiwomple,” choreographed by Andie de Vault, a lighthearted piece featuring dancers past the age of 40. The company also presented “Auto–Audio,” choreographed by Franklin, a spirited piece with a decidedly Western flavor.

The strongest work in the mixed repertory was Franklin's “Shorthanded,” a dance/voiceover piece focusing on individual interaction with technology. Here, short stories by different narrators touched upon universal life experiences. Kelly Hogan's story of her first cell phone, given to her at the age of twelve, evolves into a story about her mild frustration with her parents' more relaxed attitude toward her younger siblings, and her uphill battle for the simple privilege of watching a PG-13 movie. When she described her youngest brother watching R-rated films as a thirteen-year-old, the dancers swayed their hips lasciviously, as the narrator laughed at the injustice of it all.



In a sweet final excerpt to "Shorthanded," narrator Colleen Bergeron described a family member's use of a 35-millimeter camera to take photos and turn them into slideshows that the family watched together. Again, the story evolves from an anecdote about the quaint use of slide photographs into something else — an account of a family tradition. She explained that she and her brother digitized the slides after most of the older generation of her family had passed away. At this, several of the dancers on stage collapsed to the ground, leaving two performers standing, holding their hands to their chest. In the wake of lighthearted stories about Gameboys and Sony Walkmen, the excerpt gently captures how technology can help preserve memory.

Franklin's choreography, which is playful and energetic in "Auto-Audio," is strongly representational in the latter half of the show. The dancers rely on expressive hand gestures and bodily movement to depict objects and narrative in "Shorthanded" and "EyeSoar." Visual representation is clearly an important aspect of Franklin's work. Whether through the use of short films, background images, or movement, Franklin's pieces tell strong visual stories. In the case of the illustration of a family's relationship to a 35-millimeter camera, or the dancers'

portrayal of a parking lot, this type of representation is immediately compelling. In other stories — such as a woman calling for her dog in “EyeSoar” — the representation can feel a bit too overt.

Jane Franklin Dance mixes sound, video, and movement, often in refreshing and compelling ways that don't lose sight of narrative. The company employs contemporary movement to tell recognizable, everyday stories about people's lives and their connections to the places that surround them.

Photos, top: “Auto-Audio” with dancers Rebecca Weiss and Carrie Monger, photo by Gail Bingham
below: dancer Kelsey Rohr, photo by Jim Turner, both courtesy Jane Franklin Dance

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