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review :: Lionel Ritchie

-Ken Schneck, reviewer (originally posted on Voice of Dance, February 2005)

The premier of Lionel Ritchie at the William Way Center in Philadelphia on February 4th, 2005 was an outstanding success. The brain child of choreographer George Alley of Alley Ink and Alyssa Lee Wilmot of group A dance company, with music by Cenk Ergun, Lionel Ritchie redefined dance as a theatrical, visual, and intellectual art form. With wit, elegance, humor, and obscenity, this collaborative work engaged its audience to a level seldom reached by a typical run of the mill concert dance piece.

Alley's and Wilmot's performance was strong, with highlights of pedestrian movement riveting enough to make the Judson Church roll over.

Choreographically, their mix of repetition with the everyday made an interesting hybrid. Musically, Ergun's electronic score was not only riveting but intelligent, and the interaction between the dance and the music was expertly polished. Ergun's piece left the audience wanting more of his hypnotic slow and steady pulse accented with ironic samples from the Home Shopping Network.

During the entire piece, the dancers payed homage to the 80's while encouraging one's memory to travel beyond pop culture. As Alley, Wilmot, and dancer Craig Scull (who executed his movements flawlessly) frantically pulled apart plastic baggies retrieved out of a vintage suitcase, one wondered for what excursion they had signed up. But somehow this trip to nowhere in particular proved to be completely satisfying, in part due to the lasting final and messy image of the piece-- completed by Julius Cesar, a podium, folding chairs, footprints, and a powder covered dance floor-- an interactive artifact impossible to be recreated in any other manner.

All in all, Lionel Ritchie is one dance not to be missed. Alley and Wilmot are up and coming choreographers whose work may just in fact change the face of the dance world as we know it. Plunging their audiences into absurdity and darkness, glamour and beauty, Alley and Wilmot are the new generation of experimental dance.

-Ken Schneck