

Peter London Global Dance Company Rings in New Year with the Top Names in Dance

Peter London Global Dance Company rang in 2024 with, “Dance of Tomorrow,” December 28th to 31st at the Adrienne Arsht Center’s Carnival Studio Theater with a program that featured world premieres from dance greats Peter London, Justin Rapaport, Richard Villaverde, Jamar Roberts, Lloyd Knight and original music by trumpeter, Etienne Charles.

The program featured innovative and consistently surprising choreographies performed with terrific skill by both PLGDC company members and guest dancers many of whom included London’s former students as a Professor of Dance at Miami Dade College’s New World School of the Arts. Themes ranged from playful fantasies about human space travel to visceral pieces exploring the spiritual through movement.

The December 28th, Thursday evening and December 31st, Sunday matinee programs opened with PLGDC Artistic Director Peter London’s newest work, “Lunar Landing,” featuring a tongue in cheek exploration of the consequences of inter-planetary space exploration on human beings.

PLGDC dancers Maria Burt, Clinton Harris, Stephanie Franco, Jerome Hawkins, Carlos Realegeno, Ethan Telfort and Camilo Toro filed on stage, the men in loose fitting pants with brightly colored patches and the women with metallic one-piece suits that resembled the robot, “Maria,” in the 1927 sci-fi film “Metropolis.” Each dancer wore plastic goggles that flashed in different colors.

The dancers spun as if weightless fanning arms overhead and walking robotically before breaking away in solos and duets that explored the challenges of cyborg dance, love and sex. Among the vignettes, Carlos Realegeno performed a terrific solo snapping out powerful leaps and complicated upper body movements balanced on one leg.

Next up was the world premiere of “Current,” a solo by choreographer and former Ballet BC (Vancouver) dancer, Justin Rapaport, exploring the connection between the power of ideas and the rhythms inherent in the spoken word. Both Clinton Harris on and Camilo Toro on Sunday, were equally effective interpreting into dance a lecture by Alan Watts on the “fundamental notions of life itself.”

This was followed by the world premiere of “In Solidarity,” a breathtaking solo choreographed and performed by Miami native, Richard Villaverde, also a graduate of New World and now in his third season with the Martha Graham Dance Company.

“In Solidarity” began with Villaverde seated on the floor, bare-chested in a peach light. In silence he repeatedly lifted arms overhead, brought hands together in prayer and planted his forehead on the ground.

To a piano solo, Villaverde shaped classically-informed sequences transitioning through extreme stretches and backbends that ended in whip-like pirouettes or in Chaplin-esque walks. The piece ended as it began with the dancer on his knees in prayer.

The first act closed with the world premiere of the much-anticipated, “As An Offering” by Miami native, Jamar Roberts, former resident choreographer of Alvin Ailey Dance Theater and one of the nation’s top choreographic talents.

“As An Offering” had the added highlight of being set to the gorgeous original work, “Radical Transformations,” by world-class trumpeter, composer and University of Miami Frost School of Music faculty member, Etienne Charles.

PLGDC dancer Maria Burt opened at the center of stage, dressed in a black shirt and wrap-style black and white striped dress, rolling on the ground, then crouching and springing, arms scooping air. Stephanie Franco followed with a series of lunges and wide sweeping arms joined by Burt, Toro and Telfort executing half turns and spins, arms out to the side, stepping rhythmically to the percussion.

The constant shifts in the jazzy music gave the sequences throughout “As an Offering” a consistently improvisational feel making this work an evening highlight.

The Second Act opened with the PLGDC reprisal of, “Combinaison,” a fifteen minute work for nine dancers by French born Martinique hip-hop artist and choreographer, David Milôme.

Set to the work, “Miamwen, Wapiyon, Razzia” (also composed by Milôme) the work opened to techno-funk music, the men dressed in black and the women in orange and green shorts and halter tops. Throughout the piece, both solos and group sequences were precise and together, the dancers exuding enjoyment whipping out every sort of flip and change of direction.

Dancer Tt’Shaylah Lightbourn shined here whether with others or on her own. In one sequence, she shimmied from side to side, pumping shoulders and abdomen as she brought her arms up her body and overhead. Audiences on Thursday and Sunday responded enthusiastically.

Next up was the world premiere of the exquisite solo, “Deeply Rooted,” choreographed and performed by Miami native, Lloyd Knight, now principal dancer with Martha Graham Dance.

Dressed in brown briefs, Knight began on the floor writhing as if in pain. Whether simply shifting weight or raising his leg back in arabesque only to roughly drop it, Knight was a magnetic presence throughout the five minute work.

London’s “Children of the Underground” wrapped up the program, opening with the dancers dressed in white, women on the left, men on the right and dancers Harris and Telfort between them. Traditional Loa and Orisha songs invoked West African deities as Harris swept his arms toward the backdrop then passed them above Telfort who writhed on the floor as if possessed.

The vibe turned festive and the women entered the stage dressed in brightly colored dresses holding wands tipped in long feathers, which they whipped in time, flinging their arms, Carnival-like, to “Soweto Blues” by the British Ghanaian musician, Juls.

In another sequence, PLGDC dancers Telfort and Wesley Wrap entered in batik print pants for a playful and flirtacious club-like trio with Lakeria Robinson.

Throughout each of these sequences many of the arm, hip and shoulder movements recurred suggesting how the history of the ancestral dances persisted in new contexts like social festivals and the club scene.

“Children” closed as it began, the dancers interpreting sacred music on the floor in prayer and ending it again on their knees, hands extended in offering as the Thursday and Sunday audiences rose to their feet.