

CRITIC'S PICK

Review: An Invitation to the Dance, Simple and Subtle

DD Dorvillier's solo at the Chocolate Factory evokes a dream state as it digs into the same river of dance twice.



photo (by Brian Rogers) of DD Dorvillier's "Dance is the archeologist, or an idol in the bone."

As soon as DD Dorvillier walked onto the stage of the Chocolate Factory Theater on Thursday night, you knew you were in the presence of somebody long immersed in her craft, capable of doing a lot with a little. Through the simple act of standing still and surveying the audience, she seemed to light a spark in the bare warehouse space, her enigmatic gaze bristling with minute shifts of awareness. It was the subtlest invitation into a dance made with the lightest touch.

A fixture of New York's downtown dance scene beginning in the 1990s, Dorvillier moved to France in 2010; she now lives and works in Burgundy. In "Dance is the archeologist, or an idol in the bone.," a United States premiere presented with L'Alliance New York's Crossing the Line festival, she puts into practice choreographic ideas that, according to the program, came to her in a dream after researching several obscure archaeological sites in France. Questions about preserving dance, she also notes, have lately been on her mind.

True to its origins, the solo does evoke a dream state, conjured with the help of Sébastien Roux's spare yet enveloping electronic score — delicate halos of sound that descend and disappear — and with Madeline Best's characteristically transporting way with light. Allusions to the mutability of the past and to the uncertainty (or promise) of the future float into and out of the work's loose frame.

Over about 40 minutes, Dorvillier, in a uniform of jeans, white sneakers and black T-shirt, performs the same sequence twice, sort of. The second time around, you see and hear things that weren't there before. Or did you just miss them the first time? Snippets of sound from the first round, generated by Dorvillier's voice and body — her footfalls, grunts, intonations — return as recordings in the second. The effect is of a faded memory resurfacing, or of a duplicate just slightly skewed from its original.

From her initial stillness, Dorvillier slips into movement with the circling of one wrist, and then the other. As the motion travels through her body and carries her through space, it looks like wrangling, weaving, rummaging or conducting. In the first of several vocal interjections, she dryly asks, "What if?" and leaves the question lingering, an opening into the unknown.

At times, she appears to be constructing webs or walls or other edifices, creating an invisible architecture around herself that she dips under, hides behind or rests against. Some moments are goofy, as when she scrunches her face with one eye shut, sizing us up with the other. But the mood can change in an instant: Closing both eyes, her posture slumped, she has suddenly gone somewhere weightier.

Returning to her starting place and looping back, with variations, to where she's been, Dorvillier embarks on a kind of digging up and reconstructing of the very recent past. Yet despite the proximity of the two sections, and the brevity of the work, we are left with a sense of time having deepened, dense with layers of experience.

Siobhan Burke for the New York Times, October 18, 2024.