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Dance Review

Love Takes a Tumble Amid a Brewing Storm



The multimedia piece "Floyd on the Floor" by Kelly Nipper.

By CLAUDIA LA ROCCO, November 17, 2007

Love and the weather: what else is there, really? These far-reaching, changeable systems dominate our lives in myriad ways, big and small.

In "Floyd on the Floor," the Los Angeles multimedia artist Kelly Nipper tackles both, conflating them in a 25-minute work that zigzags between didacticism and a childlike delight in sensuality (which is not surprising, considering that this is her first live work). A Performa 07 commission with the Savannah College of Art and Design, the piece opened a three-night run on Wednesday on a small basketball court in the Judson Memorial Church gym.

Ms. Nipper's storm built slowly. The eight dancers paired off at one end of the white court, each couple consisting of a dancer lying on the floor and another crouched above, catlike, on hands and feet. They slid down the court as units, two of them infiltrating the audience members ringing the performance, the other two curling up in the center over a black Labanotation diagram of one of Ms. Nipper's earlier video pieces.

Labanotation, which uses symbols on a staff to document movement, is a complex, specialized language; for experts its explication of dance is crystal clear. For everyone else it's mystifying. You could perhaps say the same about dance, and Ms. Nipper added another layer of exclusivity: a recorded French text, spoken by a man and a woman.

My high school French gave me the outlines: night passing, you and me, love. But the details, as they often do, remained mysterious as the corporeal logic of dance took over. Rising, the couples spun each other about the space, like tomadoes or hurricanes (hence, perhaps, the title, referring to the 1999 storm). Leah Piehl's handsome costumes, including taupe ski masks with black patterns, pants and long-sleeved shirts for the men, and short jumpers for the women, evoked moody tropical weather through several shades of sea green and blue.

Bigger clouds gathered in the form of two blue-and-black striped parachutes, which mushroomed up in the space and rippled down to the floor through the dancers' manipulations. As quickly as this new system bloomed, it quieted, one dancer walking into the center of each parachute and turning in mechanical circles, to another dancer's measured counts, so that the fabric twisted into a tight spiral.

To another count, the dancers stood between the parachutes and curtsied before abruptly exiting. No more weather. No more love.