



Photo by Margo Moritz

James Graham is shown in a production of *Stay*.

Hope Mohr Dance well worth seeing – anytime

Dane review

by Elizabeth Costello

ODC's resident choreographer Hope Mohr aptly describes her piece, *Stay*, as a fiction without a narrative. From its opening moment, when Michael Galloway appears in a one-armed backless tuxedo jacket nodding his head like a ringleader from a nightmare circus, *Stay* offers a wonderful opportunity to be convinced by the logic of a dream. Inspired by the paintings of Francis Bacon, the costumes and lighting employ color in a thoughtful, painterly way, and the five dancers (Patrick Barnes, James Graham, Lindsey Renee Derry, Tegan Schwab, and Galloway) move with great subtlety and emotional intelligence to create a carefully articulated visual field.

Two large arrows decorated with green lights seemed to be symbols of an expectation that is confronted by the piece – that a performance should tell us explicitly where and how to look. One of the arrows disguises a camera that at once is used to project Barnes and Graham's gently erotic gestures—the arrow that defamiliarizes Eros, framing an image of two people touching one another's faces.

David Szlasa's live video brings the image both closer and moves it farther away, making it at once familiar and strange. There are several striking entrances, particularly that of Barnes, who, in addition to being a dancer, engages in feats of super-human strength as a participant in Highland games. He is notably thicker than the other male dancers, yet his jump as he enters is remarkably light and high.

The sound design by Teddy

Hulsker is eclectic and interesting. The dancers' movement phrases also reference many styles, yet the piece hangs together as a seamless and elegant whole.

If *Stay* is a fiction without a narrative, the second piece in the program, *The Material of Attention*, is a field notebook from an experiment. A window onto Mohr and fellow choreographer Christian Burns's shared improvisation practice, the piece is different every night, allowing the dancers to play and examine their habits.

It is fun to watch the bodies move about in the gender-neutral costumes of white t-shirts and jeans (with no doubt quite a bit of Lycra in the denim) and to hear the recording of the choreographers and dancers commenting on the process of improvisation interspersed with the Beatles' "Why Don't We Do it in the Road".

To paraphrase one of the recorded voices, improvisation is not an exercise geared toward a particular outcome, but an opening to every possible outcome.

After the show, Mohr and Graham remarked that this sort of exercise helps the dancers to recognize certain habits, for example to discover who tends to lead and who follows. This piece did not offer the pleasure of a fully realized work like *Stay*, but then again, that was not its intention. The Beatles song seemed a perfect refrain for an exercise in adult play.

Overall, I found the the first piece more compelling, but improvisation frequently runs the risk of being more interesting to the participants than to an audience. Regardless, I'd see anything Hope Mohr and company have to offer, and I whole-heartedly recommend that you check them out.