

DANCE REVIEW

Abstract but also funny new piece

By Allan Ulrich

Blessed be the rare postmodern choreographer possessed of a sense of humor. Hope Mohr is a member of that rare breed, and her new dance theater piece, "Manifesting," which premiered at ODC Theater on Thursday, June 9, is an amiable romp and a chapter in an artist's ongoing debate with herself. What matters most, the art or the philosophy behind it? You bet Mohr stacks the deck in her 36-minute work, which unites six members of Hope Mohr Dance for a ninth annual season.

A melange of interspersed songs (Beth Wilmurt), skits

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Mohr's humorous look at philosophy of dance

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and dance, “Manifesting” suggests that manifestos both weaken and fortify artistic resolve. Mohr loads the dialogue with excerpts from famous manifestos by Yvonne Rainer, Antonin Artaud, Tristan Tzara and others; they are periodically quoted to bolster the weak of will. White animal masks repose on tables to which the performers retreat in a state of resignation when they’re not cavorting like refugees from a menagerie.

They all crawl lethargically until they decide they will all write manifestos. They scribble manically, then they demolish what they write. The place soon resembles a December blizzard as bits of paper whoosh through the air. This is inspired stuff,

Hope Mohr Dance:

Mohr’s “Manifesting,” “Stay.” 8 p.m., Friday-Saturday, June 10-11. \$30. ODC Theater, 3153 17th St., S.F. (415) 863-9834. www.odctheater.org/tickets.

📺 To see a preview of “Manifesting,” go to <https://vimeo.com/169001134>

recalling vintage Marx Brothers.

What Mohr does in her script and movement is to evoke a state of perpetual insecurity. Without manifestos to sustain them, the dancers, all in red, black and white, trudge across the space or roll on the floor. This is a society of artists always on the verge of a nervous breakdown, and when Tara McArthur loses it, the moment really strikes a note of hilarity.

Mohr has assembled a

team that dances as well as it harmonizes. The others include Jane Selna, Jenny Stulberg, James Graham, Wiley Naman Strasser and Kenny Toll, who performs on that rare instrument, the melodica, as well as he dances. There is no background music; accompanying throughout are sound designer Theodore J.H. Hulsker’s ringing telephones, busy signals and looped recorded messages. It’s a bit unnerving, as is Mohr’s invitation to the audience to write its own manifestos during intermission. At least the choreographer seems aware of the paradox explored in this piece. As one of Mohr’s lyrics puts it: “I follow each rule to stand self-reliantly.”

Despite its likability, “Manifesting” needs a bit of tightening to eliminate the rough spots. I certain-



Margo Moritz

James Graham in Mohr’s “Stay,” part of the Hope Mohr Dance season at ODC Theater through Saturday, June 11.

ly hope that Mohr won’t tuck it away after these three performances. It’s hard to understand why choreographers don’t revive and polish their best material. I say that as a member of the audience who found little to cheer last year in Mohr’s “Stay,” the reprise of which completes the current program.

Two dancers (Selna and Parker Murphy) are new, while David Szlasa’s vivid lighting seems refined. Mohr work is her response to the paintings of English painter Francis Bacon. This season, the homoerotic impulse seems more explicit from Michael Galloway’s bounding entrance. Murphy and Graham lock in

an embrace. Murphy’s bloodsucking attack on Galloway and the latter’s enjoyment are downright creepy. The women (Selna and Lindsey Renee Derry) still seem less than organic to the piece, but “Stay” is hard to dismiss.

Allan Ulrich is The San Francisco Chronicle’s dance correspondent.