



Monday March 12, 2018

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Company Wayne McGregor innovates in 'Autobiography'



Company Wayne McGregor's extraordinary "Autobiography" is onstage at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. (Courtesy Andres Uspenski)

By Leslie Katz on March 9, 2018 1:15 pm

Program notes to brainy British dancemaker Wayne McGregor's "Autobiography" call the 2017 work "a cycle of choreographic portraits illuminated by the sequencing of his own genome" and the Wellcome Genome Campus Society and Ethics Research in South Cambridgeshire, England, is listed among McGregor's "ongoing scientific partners."

That information isn't obvious upon experiencing the 80-minute piece, which got its West Coast premiere in a San Francisco Performances presentation at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts on Thursday.

Academic explanations aside, "Autobiography" is a heck of a lot of fun to watch.

Company Wayne McGregor's 10 dancers of varied ethnicities — Jordan James Bridge, Rebecca Bassett-Graham, Travis Clausen-Knight, Louis McMiller, Daniela Neugebauer, Jacob O'Connell, James Pett, Fukiko Takase, Po-Lin Tung and Jessica Wright — are strong, flexible and powerful, and clearly have a symbiotic relationship with McGregor (who appeared with some of them in a demonstration-talk during the troupe's 2016 stop in The City).

"Autobiography," a series of 23 abstract vignettes set to an electronic, primarily melody-free score by Jlin, is mesmerizing throughout.

It opens with the stretching, strong, sinewy O'Connell emerging solo amid a dark, foggy mist, accompanied by rustling peals of bells and wind chime-like noises.

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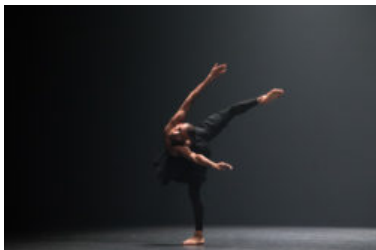
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Jacob O'Connell has a dramatic solo in "Autobiography." (Courtesy Andres Uspenski)

A metal sculpture-like apparatus (set design by Ben Cullen Williams) at ceiling level, which lowers to the floor at one point, and dynamic lighting by Lucy Carter evocatively complement the movement, appealing in its lack of cliches.

Each scene offers a different cast — androgynous dancers, attired simply in black, white and flesh tones, are solo, in pairs, small groups or the full ensemble — and different mood.

Strength, agitation and cooperation characterize the faster-paced, earlier segments, the dancers balancing, leaping, lifting and running, as Jlin's drums beat loudly and monotonously.

In one scene, a few pairs interact as computerized vocals in the score make pleas: "You don't want to hurt anyone" and "but I do, and I'm sorry."

Hard, industrial sounds accompanying the ever-changing compositions of dancers briefly give way to melancholy, melodic moments (a string ensemble plays as a couple dances in perhaps the piece's most conventional segment), and a peaceful scene suggesting morning has birds chirping, sounds of light rain and insects, and softly plinking piano as the dancers calmly walk onstage carrying chairs, then set them down, to incorporate sitting into the movement.

At one point, when the soundtrack is reminiscent of a scratchy broken record, members of the company execute pirouettes as if in a treasured classical ballet.

And although "Autobiography" deftly illustrates the precision and skill associated with traditional dance, its strength lies in McGregor and his talented troupe's affecting, extraordinary innovations.

REVIEW

Company Wayne McGregor

Presented by San Francisco Performances

Where: Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 700 Howard St., S.F.

When: 7:30 p.m. March 9, 2 and 7:30 p.m. March 10

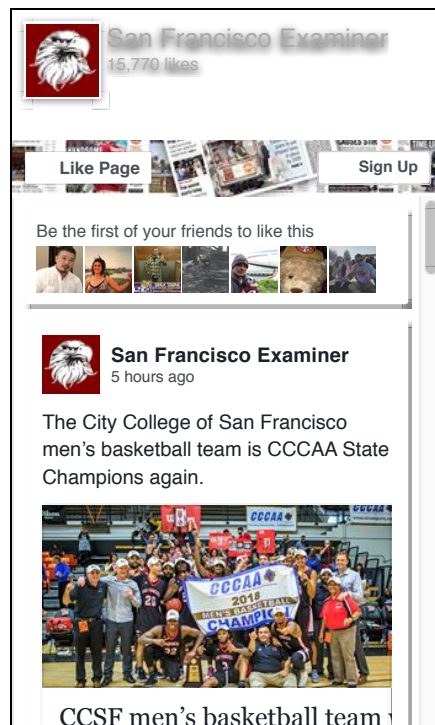
Tickets: \$35 to \$60

Contact: (415) 978-2787, www.sfperformances.org

Note: The 2 p.m. March 10 show is a family matinee.

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The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook post from the San Francisco Examiner. At the top, the profile picture is a red square with a white grizzly bear head, and the name "San Francisco Examiner" is displayed in a grey font with "15,770 likes" below it. Below the profile information are two buttons: "Like Page" and "Sign Up". A message says "Be the first of your friends to like this" above a row of six small profile picture icons. The main post content starts with the same profile picture and name, followed by "5 hours ago". The text of the post reads: "The City College of San Francisco men's basketball team is CCCAA State Champions again." Below the text is a photograph of the basketball team and their coaches on a court, holding a large blue and white banner that says "CCCAA 2018 STATE BASKETBALL CHAMPIONS". At the bottom of the post, the text "CCSF men's basketball team" is partially visible.



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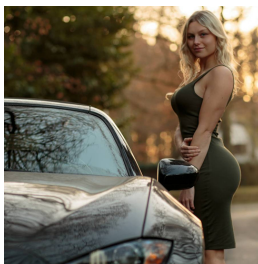
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