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**SUSAN REITER**

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

“Does what you do make a difference?” is the question asked out loud right at the start of David Dorfman’s underground, the fierce, provocative new work he was prompted to create after having a powerful reaction to the 2002 documentary *The Weather Underground*.

“Seeing the Weather Underground people interviewed—and thinking back to that time— about what they would have done differently (if anything), I thought about the present as well,” Dorfman said shortly after a run-through of the piece, which seemed barely containable within the confines of a large BAM studio. “I’m not trying to explain or be the Weather Underground people. I’m more trying to reflect its history into the present day. Are those feelings/tactics/actions applicable today?”

As a teenager in the Chicago area, Dorfman was riveted by the 1968 Democratic Convention—and its attendant battles out in the streets—and caught up in the country’s powerful political passions of the day. Watching the former Weather Underground members in the film—former firebrands in their twenties who are now around 60—led him to reflect on questions of then and now, the differences and similarities. “Now they’d be called ‘domestic terrorists.’ Then, they maybe were ‘violent activists.’”

Intrigued by their action and choices, Dorfman developed his piece around such volatile topics as violence and risk-taking. “We all have violence within us. To me, it’s about making decisions, with your speech and your actions, to not be violent towards one another. So I am, deep down, a complete pacifist—and yet I admire the Weather Underground. It’s an ambivalent admiration—a qualified idolization.”

*Underground* features music by Jonathan Bepler, scenic design by Cameron Anderson, and video design (including documentary footage) by Jacob Pinholster. For the first time, Dorfman worked with a co-director—Alex Timbers, the artistic director of Les Freres Corbusier, who directed the recent



attention-getting Hell House.

“I was initially in search of a writer, or perhaps dramaturge. Alex could do all of this,” Dorfman explained. “We’ve both given a lot of feedback on each other’s ‘areas of expertise.’ I never hold back my comments on the text because I’ve always done both text and dance, from my very first piece. I’m always asking his opinion; I’m always deferring. I love that sense of direct collaboration.”

The present-day situation certainly played into Dorfman’s fascination with the subject matter and interest in addressing the powerful questions it provoked. As an associate professor of dance at Connecticut College since 2004, he’s certainly in touch with today’s students and in a position to observe their political engagement—or lack thereof.

Combining the personal and political is an ongoing part of his work, which features robust, sometimes ungainly physicality and often examines the darker underside of who we are and how we deal with one another.

“I have no answers in this piece,” he states. “I would like to, on one level, instigate, and on another level, I’m more into asking questions so that people maybe take a moment to say, ‘What do I want to do, and will it make a difference?’”

Nov. 16-18. BAM Harvey Theater, 651 Fulton St. (at Rockwell Pl.), B’klyn, 718-636-4100; 7:30, \$20-\$45.

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