

David Dorfman Bends the Way the Wind Is Blowin': NYC Dance

By Tobi Tobias

Nov. 14 (Bloomberg) -- "Now," urges a bunch of impassioned people, first whispering, then yelling as they go through the motions of hurling hand grenades. These feisty figures in raggle-taggle outfits are not young political activists about to blow up buildings but performers rehearsing David Dorfman's "underground."

The piece tackles the dicey subject of the Weather Underground, the radical group that made headlines from 1969 through the late '70s using violent tactics in an effort to stop the war in Vietnam.

The subject is pertinent right now, Dorfman feels. Yes, the group's activities bear an unnerving resemblance to terrorism as we experience it today. But, he contends, the group provided a powerful contrast to the kind of pervasive apathy that lets bad guys win.

Dorfman credits as an inspiration Sam Green and Bill Siegel's 2003 documentary film, "The Weather Underground." His choreography tells no specific story, though. Instead, it explores the psychology of the rebels. Through a series of vivid vignettes, Dorfman shows the youthful energy of the protesters, their easy rage, and the communal bonding they found in their common cause. Inadvertently, perhaps, he reveals the naivete of a political stance that permits no compromise.

In a bit of postmodern irony, 20-30 minutes of dancing occur before the official curtain time. As soon as the house opens for seating the audience, Dorfman himself takes the stage alone.

World Aflame

Again and again, before a backdrop evoking a world in flames, he moves out toward the center of the space to launch an invisible weapon. Each advance ends in a retreat in which he hunkers down, torso curved sideways, and thrusts one arm high, fist clenched.

Then he runs, crashes to the ground, rolls away, rights himself and starts over. From time to time, he pauses, as if to reconsider his moves, like a choreographer figuring out the first stage of a work with his own body.

The "character" he's playing may be a middle-aged guy dressed geezer-casual style in nondescript slacks and a shapeless cardigan, but his spine is as supple as a snake's and his resilience is remarkable.

David Dorfman Dance is at the BAM Harvey Theater in Brooklyn, Nov. 14 and 16 through 18. Information: +1-718-636-4100 or <http://www.bam.org>.

(Tobi Tobias is a dance critic for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are her own.)

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