THEATER PIZZAZZ

December 7, 2015

TERE O'CONNOR'S THE GOODBYE STUDIES

A pretentious, exhausting and unsatisfying evening at the prestigious Kitchen.

Photo Yi-Chun Wu

Tere O'Connor is a respected modern dance choreographer and teacher, so it was with high expectations that I attended his *The Goodbye Studies* at the Kitchen in the shadow of the Highline.

O'Connor's "Choreographic Note" in the program went on and on about "the indeterminate qualities of dance," "the crowd as the protagonist," how "disparate elements can reveal form" and "accidental structures" asserting their "validity against those crafted with 'comprehension.'"   Whew! Okay!

Certainly, *The Goodbye Studies* could be considered a study in crowd management, but is it a dance? It is clear that the series of movements and the corresponding groupings and re-groupings of these twelve motley dancers was a distillation of a long process, but the meandering nature of the work and extremely varied levels of professionalism of the cast made for a pretentious, exhausting and unsatisfying evening at the Kitchen.

Dressed in ordinary, but stylish street wear by Lily Gold, Eleanor Hullihan and Michael Ingle, the dancers at first ambled onto the stage, a large black box.   Michael O'Connor's

admirable lighting managed to give this large, plain space an ever-varying ambiance. The trickle of dancers, moving at first in silence, gradually built to a stage full of dancers as James Baker's constantly mutating score began. His aural contribution consisted of distorted voices, low hums, repeated rhythmic thumps, whooshes of white noise and, of course, silence.

Gestures emerged above lunges and casual poses. Hands swatted and fluttered at the end of reaching arms, arms which made angular semaphore-like gestures which were simultaneously laden with innate meaning and totally meaningless without context. (This last bit has become an annoying staple of Post Modern Dance.) The separate groups coalesced into a circle—another repeated pattern—then spread out across the playing area in small groups. The contrast between these groups where one would be still, another moving legato and the last in sharp, staccato steps never gained any momentum

This went on for ninety minutes with the focus changing from large formations to solos, duets or trios and the mood changing with capricious speed, the dancers either grimly staring out at the assembly of viewers, forcing smiles, helping or pushing each other, prancing or walking about, all without any sense of purpose and without any real sensuality.

The occasional use of repetition, the return of a visible bulwark, was a weak attempt at structure. Just because you repeat something—a movement, a gesture, a grouping, a sound—doesn't make it a dance composition and most definitely doesn't give it flow. And, the incredibly unchallenging, catch-as-catch-can movement vocabulary—a bit of ballet, hand gestures, "meaningful" glances and smiles, natural walks and runs and rolling about on the floor—just became boring to look at, especially as performed by this group of dancers. To give them credit, they all appeared to be on the same—pretentious—wave length.

A group of dissimilar people simply existing in time and space can be experienced standing on any street corner in New York City. There will definitely be "disparate elements" that coalesce into "accidental structure," like, for example, a batch of pedestrians suddenly crossing a street when the light turns green. But, as wonderful and occasionally awesome that can be, it is boring on the stage.

To make things worse, there were at least five perfectly acceptable possible endings to *Goodbye*, but Mr. O'Connor decided to go on and on, finally choosing the most pedestrian and obvious ending: a return to an oft-repeated formation of the dancers upstage center where some knelt, some bent over and other reached up to the sky.

For the record, the dancers were: Simon Courchel, Tess Dwoman, Lily Gold, Natalie Green, Eleanor Hullihan, Michael Ingle, Joey Loto, Oisín Monaghan, Angie Pittman, Mary Read, Laurel Snyder and Lauren Vermilion.