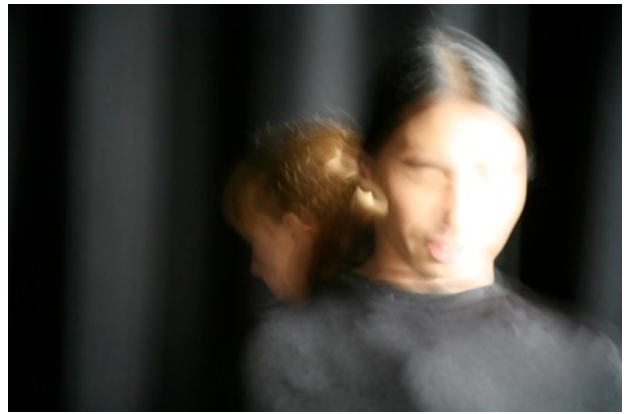


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Loving Explored

by Ellen Chenoweth

If you missed the National Equality March in DC last weekend, attending the performance of *The Loving Project: E-Race*, the latest evening-length work by Stephen Clapp and Laura Schandelmeier, at Dance Place could have been a satisfying substitute. Both were loud and articulate calls for the right for humans to marry whomever they'd like, in the company of a community of others who feel the same way. The performance was facilitated by Peter diMuro who led the audience in a series of participatory exercises and provided gently comic relief. You had to be willing to play along with the small dose of corniness, but overall the emphasis on freedom of choice on the part of the audience nearly fit with the idea of freedom to choose who to love and marry presented on stage.



Fortunately, the dancing of Schandelmeier and Clapp fit together so tightly that the seams of the performance were not only invisible, they were unimaginable. The two were like one rolling, lifting, mesmerizing organism, one half with long swishy blond hair and the other with long swishy black hair. It is a rare and phenomenal treat to see two dancers who are so beautifully in tune with each other, with their partnering carefully honed and developed through years of kinesthetic communication. Their duet was featured in one of four sections, *It Takes Three*, performed first at the Friday night performance. The choreography included several richly-laden movements; one dancer pointing out their cheek, or presenting a shoulder as if to point out the source of the pain. This provoked various responses from the other, ranging from supportive to antagonistic, or some mixture of the two. A movement that looked as if Schandelmeier was rubbing out a stain on her own hand looked engagingly original. A pleasant surprise came as Schandelmeier and Clapp took other partners and were equally compelling, Clapp dancing with the Ken Yamaguchi-Clark and Schandelmeier with Ilana Faye Silverstein. The diminutive Clapp paired with the commanding figure of Yamaguchi-Clark led to some especially poignant moments. After the series of duets, the section ended with a trio between Silverstein, Schandelmeier, and Clapp, with each person rotating into the center position of the three. I was left somewhat confused about the title; why does it take three? Were the choreographers making a case for group marriage in addition to same-sex marriage?

The second section of the evening, Leon Theremin and Levinia Williams, presented the story of African American dancer Lavinia Williams and her Russian husband Leon Theremin, inventor of one of the first electronic instruments. It seems likely that modern dance and the theremin have been combined before, but I had never seen such a thing and it was drop dead cool. Clapp coaxed the theremin to produce music while maintaining an intense connection with the audience and using every bit of his body. The section provided an absorbing synthesis of dance and music, as one body simultaneously produced both. Some of the fascination got lost as Clapp turned his back to the audience for later sections and the performance aspect drooped, but the introductory piece more than made up for it.

Schandelmeier included her virtuosic solo, *Their Then Now/Doin' the Shorty George*, previously swooned about here. I love being able to see work multiple times and this was especially rewarding as Dance Place allowed for a good view of Schandelmeier's facial expressions and movement nuances. Strange and lovely use of repetition as Schandelmeier seemed bossed around by the music, which relentlessly looped through groups of notes. In this iteration, Schandelmeier shared the work with Clapp and Silverstein, with each of them performing pieces of the solo, but it seems so perfectly suited to her own angles and mechanical qualities that I was a bit sad. The evening concluded with *Loving vs. Virginia*, and this section worked so well as an ending that I would scrap the whole device of letting the audience decide which section gets to go where. Even for those familiar with the case, it was stirring to hear the details recounted as the inter-racial couple of Mildred and Richard Loving were roused from their beds by the police and thrown in jail in 1959. Clapp and Schandelmeier danced the scene while DiMuro narrated, with DiMuro arriving at the moment when the couple plead guilty at the same time that Clapp proposed to Schandelmeier on one knee.

E-Race proved a powerful example of combining dance and political text without coming across as preachy or didactic, an uncommon feat. (One of the few disappointments of the evening was the post-performance discussion, in which the dancers responded to perceptive audience questions with comically evasive non-answers. Both sides might as well skip this component of a performance if it's treated so lightly.)

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