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E_Merging II

Dominic Walsh Dance Theater

Hobby Center

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by Nancy Wozny

[Dominic Walsh Dance Theater](#) paired two icy works at an icy cold theater this past weekend in *E-Merging II*, his yearly foray into more experimental work. The show presented the world premiere of Dominic Walsh's *Terminus*, and the US premiere of Gustavo Ramirez Sansano's *Dicese*. The tenor of both works felt remarkable similar, both chillers—dark and foreboding.

The company has also had some changes in the ranks. The troupe, streamlined into three Italians and three Americans, was in top-form. Domenico Luciano was sidelined due to an injury and DWDT favorites, Lindsey McGill and Paola Georgudis, have officially retired from the company. All were missed.

E_Merging is also a time for Walsh to collaborate with noted Houston visual artists. This time around he's selected Italian-born painter Nicola Parente and painter/sculptor Cameron Sands.

Terminus, Walsh's newest opus for five dancers, takes a while to induce its spell. But like a good novel, its worth waiting out the slow opening for its later, juicier parts. Walsh is at his best when he's not in a rush. Several square screens are suspended above the stage, surrounded by large white flood lights. Projected on to the screens are Nicola Parente's footage, stills, and paintings, capturing the dancers in motion and in closeup. Later during the piece, more abstract images resembling urban decay come and go in a rhythmic accompaniment. On the side of the stage sits Two Star Symphony, Houston's venerable indie string quartet, playing a collection of their greatest hits. The dancing moves in solos, duets, and scattered ensemble work enlisting Walsh's highly sharp-edged choreography, all of which fits nicely into the container shared with the edgy string musicians and Parente's striking work. Walsh frames his dances with a good eye for the whole of what an audience experiences. Walsh has been making strides this season in having the visual design assume a larger presence in his work.

Parente's contribution works well and there's a nice sense of scale and balance between the size and placement of the images. Costumes, jointly designed by Walsh, Parente, and Luciano, consisted of sleek paneled skirts, and merged well with the overall structure of the piece.

Jeremy Choate's eerie lighting stays within Walsh's cryptic mood. At various intervals flood lights come on leaving the dancers backlit in an otherworldly glow. It feels very urban, like artificial light on a street corner at 2 am.

The conclusion of *Terminus* is particularly mysterious. Dawn Dippel and Riccardo De Nigris appear in nude-toned underwear and proceed to cover each other with blue paint through a sensual partnering. Possibly, they have become the paintings. The ballet's structure is curious, rambling but still arresting. In the end, the piece succeeds on its collaborative energy. Also, it's good to see Walsh push himself into unknown territory, resisting more tried and true templates for dancemaking.

Sansano's *Dicese* was less successful. Walsh begins reading a statement on the anatomical details of the human body, while a growing noise begins to drown him out just at the point that the verbiage is becoming mildly tedious. All of this happens as a dancer stands motionless, assuming the role of the human in question.

Amy Cain writes the question, "is the conscious sum of all our perversions" on a large plexiglass board while dancing up a storm. Finally, she adds the word "Beauty" at the front of the sentence, transforming the question into Salvador Dali's oft-quoted words, Beauty is the conscious

sum of all our perversions.” As clever as this section is, the phrase renders little in the way of meaning or context to Sansano's aimless ballet. The plexiglass screen is also paired with a mylar wall. There were glimmers of visual interest when the dancers moved in front of it. Sands's contribution has merit but seems lost in a sea of loose thoughts. The bare industrial stage has that “been done way too much before” look; we all know what the back of the Hobby Center looks like by now, and, for the most part, it's distracting and rarely, if ever, works as a backdrop. At the piece's most amusing point, the dancers don paper doll outfits which end up hung up on ballet barre. At the conclusion, Federica Vincifori screams at the dolls outfits. There was some great dancing here, but alas, the ballet never found its center.

The dancers—spectacular all—included Walsh, Cain, Dippel, Riccardo De Nigris, and Vincifori.

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