

PILOBOLUS DANCE THEATRE
Christopher Newport University
June 2, 2006

Even though Pilobolus has been around for decades, I have never been where they were at the same time. So, this was my first exposure to this highly original, certainly unconventional company of dance, gymnastics, acrobatics, human sculpture, improvisation and everything in between.

The performers are incredibly strong and athletic. Notice I didn't call them dancers because they are much more (or less?) than just dancers. They are living sculpture and do amazing physical feats of balance and leverage. Dance as one normally thinks of it is a minor part of their art.

"Aquatika" was the title of the opening work. It's evocative of the ocean and the plants and creatures who live there. A woman is pulled under or surrenders to the ocean's power and joins in the mysterious beauty of this world. Merce Cunningham recently did a somewhat similar piece called "Ocean." Both are intriguing.

The second offering was "The Empty Suitor." A solo work performed by Andrew Herro, it was made up of clever, clown like antics that one might see at a circus. Like his colleagues, Mr. Herro is limber and as elastic as a rubber doll as he cavorts around balancing on rolling pipes and gets himself entrapped in a bench. It's lots of fun.

"Sweet Purgatory" and "Day Two" completed the program. "Purgatory" was the most satisfying and theatrically exciting, emotionally fulfilling work for me. With stunning lighting by Stephen Strawbridge, it captivates one's attention as the dancers progress from hell to redemption. I found "Day Two" a bit ambiguous. As impressive and quite astounding as these performers are, my feeling is that I don't want to see them too often. My mind began to wander. The movement seemed repetitious. There are, finally, limitations to their vocabulary of stage activity. The curtain call was great fun, I think, but I couldn't see it because the audience was doing the de rigueur standing ovation that every performance receives in Hampton Roads.

This was a final offering of the Virginia Arts Festival that has given lovers of dance a lot to cherish and remember, For WHRO-FM, this is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.