

## Aszure Barton & Artists

By JENNIFER MCLESTER | October 11, 2011

I never thought it would be possible to make a crotch grab inoffensive, artful, and moving. It happened this past weekend at the Ferst Theater.

A good friend of mine came into town for their birthday and we headed off to see ***Aszure Barton and Artists*** at my favorite space in town. Due to a busy schedule and having to swat tiny needy children out-of-the-way when I need to use technology, I hadn't done the proper research to find out exactly what we were seeing. My guest was looking forward to being surprised and I was biting my fingernails, hoping it was at least dance.

In fact, it was dance and I haven't been this moved by a performance in a long time.

There is something you get from a really good current contemporary artist that you don't get from the classic modern companies and theater. It's a rawness and connectedness that I, for one, crave in my art. Aszure Barton fit the bill on all accounts.

The concert was relatively short, leaving us wanting more. Two pieces were presented, one in each half.

*"Blue Soup"* presents the company dressed in blue suits and socks. The choreography embarks on her autobiographical journey, a small collection of Barton's notable pieces. As the company faces up-stage, a soloist casually has a silent conversation with the audience. The male dancer, who looks like James Franco but goes in and out of moving like a stylized version of Jim Carrey, glides across the stage inviting us into their world. His slipping and sliding is punctuated with flails, quirky expressions and *développé*.

Barton's work is unexpected. She paints with wonderful stillness and shape. The movement is quiet but saturated with energy, the shapes explode with intention. As the solos weave in and out of the big picture, the rest of the dancers remained unified. At one point everyone stands strong facing downstage with one dancer inverted standing on her head. At that point, the whole company starts to rock, a very simple image with a big impact.

The first time we see Barton herself, she is alone scooping through the space in a bouncy African influenced phrase. As she executes tasteful crotch movement, the men of the company join her one by one, lip-syncing to operatic female soprano voices...unexpected.

The final image was all the dancers in a giant pile in the middle of the stage.

*"BUSK"* was the second half of the concert. Another potential name could be *"The Life and Times Of a Dark Alley"*. As the curtain goes up the wings of the stage are gone, and the space is transformed. It is completely open and there is nowhere to hide. Barton is alone and her performance is impeccable. The movement doesn't stop at her limbs; it extends into her face and glows off her skin into the space around her. This is true of all her dancers.

The themes in this piece are dark and whimsical. They range from dreams to suicide. After the opening solo the company joins in like dark angels roaming around *"Dante's inferno"*, turning into beggars crawling from the

shadows. The honest costuming, black hoodies, white gloves and sweat pants, become another character element in the series of events. The black clothes, in the black space under different lighting effects are powerful. The hoods instantly turn the performers into a chorus of grim reapers or one dark scary mass undulating under the light.

There was no misstep in the show. The dancers were technical and present every millisecond. The movement is smooth, raunchy and goofy at the same time. Images of clowns on break, smoking in the alley came to mind. A favorite image was when Tobin Del Cuore as a juggler appeared, obviously a street performer. His gestural solo breaks into a long syrupy crawl, which leads, to a slightly uncomfortable masturbation then to a hanging. The dancer returning full circle to juggling suggests we are seeing his internal dialogue as he panhandles for change.

There is a beautiful moment of light when dancer Emily Oldak, wearing nothing but a nude pair of undergarments, enters the space. She bends and folds as a masterful yogini goddess, energy infinitely expanding in all directions, like a conflicted Eve suspended in space.

Barton's musicality is impeccable, and the fact that she can marry sound with an anything goes choreography puts her in an elite class of artists. She has also surrounded herself with a company who work incredibly well together and can bring her vision to life. After the show, I was asked by my guest who my favorite dancer was... and I couldn't give an answer. There is no way to judge the individual players when the ensemble is so powerful.

I haven't been viscerally affected by a concert like this in a very long time. I have to thank the Ferst Theater for bringing artists like Aszure Barton to Georgia.