

## (Dance Review) Keigwin + Company at Jacob's Pillow

Review by Anna Rogovoy

(BECKET, Mass., June 23, 2011) – It is not uncommon to leave a theater after a contemporary dance performance and overhear one patron say to another, “I didn’t get it.” As dance has become more experimental, it has in some ways become less accessible. But one contemporary choreographer who is unlikely to be accused of being vague or indecipherable is Larry Keigwin, as displayed in a program of four remarkably clear dances last night at Jacob’s Pillow.



The evening opened with *Megalopolis*, a work for a dozen dancers in black and silver spandex bodysuits with glitter accents. They wiggle, strut, and thrust their way across the stage in synchronized phrases evocative of a wacky Tim Burton-esque corps de ballet. Dancers split off in solos, duets, and trios, and we see an exploration of group dynamics as individual presences peek out and then are reabsorbed. Twice the music shifts from Steve Reich’s hypnotic “Sextet-Six Marimbas” to tracks by hip-hop artist M.I.A., and with each shift comes a surge of energy and a choreographic foray into hip-hop influenced movement. While somewhat predictable, *Megalopolis* was a rousing starting point and an excellent means by which to showcase the commendable versatility of the dancers of Keigwin + Company.

A work in four sections set to “Symphony No. 6 in D Major” by Haydn, *Bird Watching* features three men and two women of the company, all of whom are in bespangled tutus as the lights come up. Here is Keigwin at his campiest, his most affectionately mocking:



watching and visibly aware of being watched, the dancers preen, strut, and flutter their arms as if dancing *Swan Lake*. Indeed, there is much ballet referenced here. Ashley Browne and Aaron Carr stand out as particularly well suited to this distilled classicism, but each dancer is strong.

After an intermission, the program resumes with *Love Songs*, a suite of six brief duets set to classic romantic ballads. Emily Schoen and Aaron Carr dance the first and last duets to Roy Orbison, and do so excellently. Schoen, who stood out for her calm yet commanding presence in *Megalopolis*, is a compellingly honest performer, particularly in the very last duet. Also well matched are Browne and Gary Schaufeld in two duets to Nina Simone. Their timing is the

most unexpected and interesting, and their partnering is the most inventive; in a duet to Simone's "I Put a Spell on You," they physically manipulate each others' movements in a clever interpretation of the lyrics. The partnering is strong too in Kristina Hanna and Matt Baker's duet to Aretha Franklin's "I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)" == Hanna is a dominant figure, a feisty force to be reckoned with as she pushes Baker around, seduces him, and finally carries him off the stage.

Closing the program is Keigwin's fashion industry commentary *Runaway*. *Runaway* begins while the house lights are up, as dancers begin to wander the stage, dressing and primping. With the men in suits and the women in short bright dresses with voluminous wigs, we immediately understand the world in which the piece will take place. With lighting that creates catwalk paths, a runway extending into the audience, and an (excellent) electronic score by Jonathan Melville Pratt, the theme is firmly solidified. So when the dancers begin marching robotically in grids, breaking sporadically into wild bouts of movement, we're left once again with little doubt and little to ponder. Luckily, this piece has some of the strongest choreography of the evening, with eye-catching spatial patterns and exciting weight shifts. But there's still a twinge of regret that Keigwin did not set out to challenge himself, his dancers, and his audience just a little bit more by giving out just a little bit less.