

Beautiful Geography

From Earth to the Moon, dance and music collaboration by Leah Stein and Robert Maggio, March 6 at the Arts Bank, with the Network for New Music Ensemble

Ever seen a crescent moon glow on a clear, absolutely starless night? Or suddenly wondered what is making people act so loopy only to look up with a smile to recognize the full moon? Leah Stein's and Robert Maggio's superb evening-length dance and music collaboration allows these magical resonances (and innumerable others) to haunt the senses. I'd been exposed to a very early (pre-Maggio) version of this piece last year, dancing as a last-minute replacement in a short excerpt. In ways that were scarcely evident then, *From Earth to the Moon* is simply bursting with moonlit images and metaphors.

From Earth to the Moon is also loaded with theatrical materials: In addition to dance and music, there is the sometimes ghostly, sometimes star-bright lighting of Troy O'Shia. There are the meticulously detailed costumes of Marg Bracken. In the second section of the work ("Chaconne/Fallen Road"), Bracken strikes just the right balance between astronaut gear and bright priestly robes with her billowy carrot-orange pant suits. Props—particularly oranges—take on lives of their own. In the first section ("Day's End"), Lionel Popkin (dancing with inspired wit) peeled and ate each juicy citrus bit as if deconstructing, then consuming the main idea behind the work. And, in the same section, in a particularly nuanced and sparkling performance, Roko Kawai emerged out of nowhere from the wings, crouched low to the ground and chopping an arm in a quick, sinister down swing. The action became funny when, with each chop, she suddenly began picking up orange peels and flinging them behind her.

And in one moment so beautiful it made my eyes burn, Dan Karlberg (a wonderful dancer who, more than any other, senses the particular quirkiness, yet weightiness of Stein's movement style) steps out from the dark into the light of center stage. He links his fingers together and, treading softly while slowing undulating his pelvis, he twists, turns, flattens, folds and unfolds the (of course moon-like) "O" made by his arms and hands all around his head and through the space. At the same time, Maggio's music picks up the odd beauty of Karlberg's actions with gruff rumblings, chimes, clucks and sad, low, whistling sounds (like air escaping from an air lock in outer space).

- Jonathan David Jackson