

ATE9: CALLING GAGA FROM SEATTLE

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When Gaga is done well, each movement is embodied with such focused intention, it has its own economy. We value each movement precisely because the dancer does. Seattle has an interesting relationship to Gaga—though it originated in Jerusalem, much of the modern/contemporary work being made in Seattle has a distinctly Gaga influence. One of the many ties the city has to this particular movement language is through Ate9 dANCEcOMPANY—founded in Seattle by artistic director Danielle Agami, a former company member and rehearsal director for Batsheva Dance Company. Though now based in Los Angeles, Agami often brings Ate9 back to its Seattle roots, including her most recent work *calling glenn*. *glenn* is an artistic collaboration with Wilco's Glenn Kotche, fittingly exploring the give and take involved in communication and relating to another person.

With a live score composed and performed by literal rock star Kotche, *calling glenn* is as much a musical showcase as a dance performance. Both an intricate piece of set design and practical instrument, the eponymous musician performed on a percussion setup featuring colorful bells, beads, and windchimes. Kotche's contribution though, was clearly not just for looks. Rich and varied, the score transitioned seamlessly from gentle, dreamy xylophone to a funky groove (heavy on the kick drum), and then to abstract, ambient sounds. When Ate9 dancers exhibited grounded, animalistic movements, the score was deep and jungle-like; while dancers marched single file around the stage and performed regimented, balletic steps, the soundscape transformed to a militaristic drum beat. Adding to this immersive experience, the lighting design by Jeff Forbes further expanded the world of *glenn*. Often incorporating and syncing house lighting changes with stage lighting shifts, Forbes blurred the line between stage and seat.

In the choreography, *glenn* explores the idea of communication in a multitude of ways. Dancers jump and crash into one another, another punches her body repeatedly—arms moving so quickly as to blur, others stick out their tongues and touch them together, a sort of deconstructed kiss. In one instance Kotche is handed a physical telephone and just as the audience begins to dread an overly-literal pantomime of the title of the show, things take an absurdist turn as the dancer with the matching telephone mimes comically exaggerated expressions of rage synchronized to sounds like nails on a chalkboard. A lengthy series of duets show emotional variety (some are funny, some acrobatic, others gentle and trusting) and it appears that every form of human connection is up for exploration...all except one. Part way through the duets it becomes clear that the same male dancers are repeating so that each female dancer has a male partner. Same-sex pairings, it would seem, are out of the question for some reason. Perhaps this is to reflect the gender dynamic of Agami and Kotche, though it simply reads as a forced and unnecessary stipulation.

Gender politics aside, *calling glenn* is unexpected and innovative. It is densely packed, yet accessible. Perhaps that is the result of one of Gaga's core principles, by eschewing the restricted format of codified dance forms it also allows access for an audience without prior dance knowledge. Whatever the secret is to its charm, Seattle is lucky that Agami continues to return to Ate9's home city and offer such high caliber choreography. More information on Gaga movement language can be found here. To keep up with Ate9 dANCEcOMPANY, visit their website.

Source: <http://seattledances.com/2017/03/calling-gaga-from-seattle/>