



petites danses

On October 29th and 30th Chartier Danse (Toronto) presented the world premiere of *petites danses*, choreographed by Marie-Josée Chartier, performed in Peterborough's Historic Market Hall, and presented by Public Energy.

I walked into Market Hall for a sneak peak of *petites danses* on Thursday October 27, 2016 to see six dancers (sextet), dressed in black clothes, standing on grey canvas that overwhelmed the theatre's dark hardwood floors. All twelve arms extended in seemingly random directions, however, each detail was marked with choreographed focus. These six dancers were not speaking, yet voices permeated the space. Blue tinted lights flickered with standard white.

I walked into one of many preshow moments wherein movement is queued with light. This sneak peak of *petites danses* did not only offer a glimpse into the final production, but the necessary junctures leading up to the world premiere, moments that are typically left unknown to many audience members: light checks, sound checks, stage checks.

Celebrated choreographer, Marie-Josée begins her productions with a visual concept often sparked by an object or objects, specifically a visual art object. Her notion of a visual concept is not so much focused on movement but image(s). This stage in Chartier's creative process can be seen in the various object-focal-points in each of the eight dances: grey canvas, lamps shades, plastic sheets, steel and wooden stools, a rope, a chandelier.

Chartier then begins exploring her visual concept(s) through contemporary music. *petites danses* features four composers, Rodney Sharman, Linda C. Smith, Nick Storrington, and James Tenney. Each musical composition is imagined and re-imagined, visited and revisited by different movements throughout *petites danses*.

The final stage in Chartier's creative process is dance; combining her visual concept(s), musical compositions and movement vocabulary, she choreographs her production.

Chartier draws from both professional dancers and local Peterborough performers in *petites danses*: Mairéad Filgate, Kassi Scott, Kaitlin Standeven, Shannon Litzenberger, Lucy Rupert, Kate Story, Brodie Stevenson, Darryl Tracy, Juan Villegas, Jim Angel, Chris Lemieux, Paul Clifford, and Peter Earle.

As I watched, I wondered if the dancers' movements would inform the music or if the music would inform the movement. In other words, what element would be a stronger: movement or music? This question was answered when I realized that the same four musical compositions were featured twice over the course of eight dances, and that each of the eight dances possessed a distinct atmosphere, with distinct rhythms and tones, from solo to octet. It took a conscious effort to identify which music accompanied each dance; movement commanded atmosphere.

While movement may have a stronger impact on atmosphere in *petites danses*, *how does movement change one's experience of music? And how does music change one's experience of movement?*

All three stages of Chartier's 'visual concept' offer insight into the series of questions I posed above. 'Visual concept' doesn't exclusively refer to a visual object, but to the process of exploring a concept through music, movement, space, objects, and light; it is a study in perception. Chartier embeds movement into eight separate land/soundscapes in *petites danses*; music, movement, space, objects, and light combine to create a self-contained atmosphere regardless of the musical composition each dance shares with one other dance in *petites danses*. Integral to these land/soundscapes is the audience: "the goal is to keep the audience active through movement, rhythm, and lights," says Chartier during Thursday's sneak peak. Each dance may be self-contained, yet, there exists an overarching theme; Chartier leaves just enough out of the narrative of each dance for audience interpretation. There is, however, still something clear. It may not be tangible in

a traditional sense, but it is there to grasp hold of, to guide one through each of the eight dances creating a feel akin to eight short stories - a part of a single book.

petites danses will be performed at the Registry Theatre in Kitchener on Friday November 4, 2016. Later it will then travel to Gearshifting Performance Works in Winnipeg where it will be performed as a new iteration with a new set of thirteen dancers from April 21-23, 2017.

-Dorothea Hines