

DANCE MAGAZINE

Rousseve in Polished `Chat'. (National).(David Rousseve) review)

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Rousseve in Polished `Chat' "The Ten Year Chat": A Solo Evening With David Rousseve Harold M. Williams Auditorium The Getty Center Los Angeles, California November 16, 2001

Since 1989, David Rousseve/REALITY has created trenchant, socially acute dance theater that mines its Texas-born, gay, African American artistic director's personal and family history to speak of racism, AIDS, and the redemptive power of love. To commemorate the New York-based company's first, prolific decade, however, Rousseve chose to go it alone in an evening that looked back as well as forward.

Southern California audiences first saw a work-in-progress version of "The Ten Year Chat" at a small alternative performance space in October 2000. Rousseve won a 2000 Lester Horton Award (best individual performance/western dance) for that concert, but has spent the past year informally touring, tinkering, and tightening the piece into its current, final shape: a seamless, eighty-minute meditation on survival that received its official Los Angeles premiere cupped in the intimate surrounds of the Getty Center's Harold M. Williams Auditorium. (Its world premiere occurred a week before at UC Riverside.)

Like Rousseve's large-scale work, "Chat" glides easily between charismatic storytelling and alternately poignant or luscious dance segments. Familiar, finely etched characters from "The Creole Series" and "The Dream Series"--his sharecropper Creole grandmother, a fatherless son dying of AIDS, Rousseve at various ages and momentous turning points--reveal hard truths and universal desires in superbly crafted monologues. In tandem, compelling movement vignettes translate a character's pain--or perhaps Rousseve's response to a story's unbearable details--into expressionistic, often elegiac gestural twins.

But here, gemlike moments that once stood out against washes of group activity have been set in lapidary fashion amidst a whole new dancing groove--an ebullient melange of

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Rousseve's very New York, very postmodern, release and contact improvisation-influenced style and "jazz dancing," which it turns out, was the choreographer's first love.

In stark contrast to a vocabulary of erratic twitches and primal contortions--telling details made potent by Rousseve's immeasurable performing talents--these new sections (the beginnings of a future REALITY work tentatively titled The Jazz Project) revel in the pleasures of the eight-count phrase and the obvious musical accent. Slithering and careening around the stage in juicy circular patterns, Rousseve exalts in the elegant strains of Billy Strayhorn and the unadulterated delight of a little shimmy, a little shake, and a little soft shoe. There is a profound joy at work in these interludes, and an almost spiritual satisfaction in watching it erupt in polyrhythmic articulations and a broad smile.

So what does this new direction portend? Does this newfound exuberance indicate a less politically inclined Rousseve? As if in answer, he appears disembodied on a video monitor near the end of the piece in the guise of a new character, an old man who reveals the secret of life--and the philosophy that "Chat" abides by. Life, he tells us, is nothing but an unending straggle filled with pain and sorrow. You've got to fight to survive before you fly away to heaven--but along the way, take the time to put on some great jazz music and shake your booty.

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