

Analogy for Solid Bones

Choreography by Lisa Phinney, set design by Peter Dykhuis

Reviews of dance performance

Solid Bones unfurls as tender, moving piece

Relation-based energy highlights Phinney's work

By ANDREA NEMETZ Entertainment Reporter | DANCE REVIEW

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Analogy for Solid Bones could also be titled analogy of a relationship. For relationships are at the heart of choreographer Lisa Phinney's first full-length work.

Wrapping up a three-night run tonight at 8 p.m. at the Dunn Theatre, the hour-long piece is a powerful experience for all senses, combining expressive movement, evocative soundscape by local composer Sageev Oore, effective lighting and a lovely spare set of bare tree branches created by Dalhousie Art Gallery director Peter Dykhuis.

Halifax's Jacinte Armstrong, Susanne Chui, Alicia Orr Mac Donald, Sarah Rozee and Elise Vanderborght are joined by Montreal's Peter Trosztmer and Andrew Turner for a rare opportunity to see a large group work staged by local dancers. When all seven move in unison, it's like waves washing over the stage — precise, yet with a barely contained energy as the patterns constantly shift.

Inspired by a conversation between Phinney — a founding member of Mocean Dance and an atmospheric scientist — and her dad about the beauty of loon calls, the piece investigates the behaviour and mating rituals of birds that bear remarkable similarity to the behaviour and mating rituals of humans. At the beginning of the piece, developed with the assistance of presenter Live Art Dance, the dancers are tentative, making eye contact and walking smugly by, then literally sniffing each other out. From there a mating ritual takes over with Armstrong dazzling the males with her sinuous turns and leaps.

Trosztmer and Turner in turn strut their stuff, posing like John Travolta in Saturday Night Fever, as showy as peacocks in their attempts to prove their manhood. The group gets its collective groove on in a scene that could be plucked from a swinging '60s party, complete with a group grope on a bed, and the dizzying abandon of dancers moving to their own beat, heedless of the eyes upon them. The moving silhouettes on the wall strengthen the sense of being in a '60s dance club in New York City.

Sweet and tender moments give way to a sensual segment in which Rozee and Armstrong sit on the extended legs of the male dancers, backs to the audience as they leisurely remove their shirts and toss their long hair like mermaids issuing a siren call. Towards the end the dancers seem to draw strength from each other, whether it's as a couple or a trio of women cradling each others heads. There is a palpable high degree of trust between the dancers throughout the work. Movements are defined by their strength; this is not a flowing, dreamy creation but a dynamic, compelling one.

Oore's soundscape varies from lush orchestral to meaningful single notes, from jazz to music box to dense percussion, adding significantly to the overall effect as does the lighting, with especially nice use of glowing spotlights.

Overall, the meditation on relationships, in nature or between man and woman and in society, is fascinating.

Lisa Phinney's Analogy for Solid Bones

World premiere of new dance is provocative, heartbreaking.

POSTED BY [SUE CARTER FLINN](#) ON FRI, OCT 2, 2009 AT 8:58 AM

Conservationists take note: If you want people to pay attention, partner with an artist. Lisa Phinney's Analogy for Solid Bones, inspired by the behaviours and plight of the loon, whose ecosystem is being destroyed by mercury poisoning, is a provocative and ultimately heartbreaking dance piece, subtle and yet strong in its message.

Seven dancers dressed in quiet shades of black, grey and white (including Andrew Turner, who I recognized from this summer at Montreal's Piss in the Pool—a series of dances in the bottom of an empty public pool) preen, flirt, mate and fight with the raging hormones of a late-night house party on a hot summer's night. Phinney draws graceful parallels between the two species' behaviour, without becoming cliché or too Animal Kingdom-heavy in her approach.

Sexy and at times humourous (especially when you realize how ridiculous human mating rituals really are), the mood shifts, as the dancers struggle as if there are layers of weights added to their backs. By creating this sense of empathy, Phinney has set us up for a sorrowful finale. Analogy turns into one of the darkest pieces I've seen Live Art present.

Set and sound also sets this grey tone. Peter Dykhuis' set design—large silvery branches sweep down like trees over a lake, the light rippling like waves on the ground—is minimal and gorgeous. For her soundtrack, Phinney also employed Halifax talent: narration by spoken word artist Ardath Whynacht, and music and sound design by Sageev Oore, with help from brother Dani. The sound is based on the rhythm, texture and melodies of loon calls, but the actual sound of the loon call isn't heard until later in the piece. But there are subtle reminders everywhere: when Oore holds a certain note on the piano, in dancer Susanne Chui's coquettish giggles.

Analogy for Solid Bones continues until Saturday night.