

Aerial Arts of Utah's Flight of Fancy

November 27, 2013

This weekend saw the second annual “Flight of Fancy: Soar into a Magical World,” presented by the Aerial Arts of Utah. Starting with “Above the Mist”—a piece introducing a taste of what was to come throughout the evening, with the dancers in a cocoon-like folding of the silk around their bodies—featured five of the aerial artists that would be performing throughout the night, including Aerial Arts owners Deborah Eppstein and Anne Kocherhans. It was from this cocoon structure that the dancers evolved, starting with grace and apparent ease as they glided through the footholds and wraps of the silk in synch with each others’ movements. This piece, a little on the slower tempo, with deep, elaborate beats, showcased the concentration of the dancers’ conscience—not only is she (or he) moving their body to the music, but they have to cooperate with their respective tool (in this case, each dancers’ set of silks) to hold their weight, allowing their bodies to float through the available space. The focus was strongly established from the beginning, and each dancer expressed something unique by using the silks, a lyra, the trapeze, a single rope, or even the human body itself.

While most of the dances were self-choreographed, the aura surrounding each of these dancers was one of empowerment, even while they moved through vulnerable positions. From Piper Mathews flying in a backbend with her heart exposed in “Still Moving,” to Elizabeth Stich’s seductive twists and turns in “Clap Hands,” and the showcase of strength and trust in “We Are,” where partners used AcroYoga in their display of bending and lifting, the dancers of the Aerial Arts of Utah are not afraid to let go and fall, with the strength and skill to know that something (or someone) will be there to catch them, or keep them in the air.

This strength was not only celebrated through that exposure of vulnerability, but was communicated through humor as well. Adriane Colvin did this most compellingly in her “Queen Tribute,” a rock and roll silk dance that was made vibrant with a bright hairdo, jewels on her unitard, and enthusiasm reserved for stardom. I was impressed to see her fearlessness

as she navigated her body higher and higher, independent of footholds and wraps around her waist until reaching the very top, and the subsequent falls that start like dives off the high-dive into the pool.

To further impress me, the artists used not only silks to demonstrate their skill, but the variety of tricks and moves that were used in conjunction with the lyra and trapeze were striking, keeping my interest alert to follow the ups and upside-downs. The Nancy Simpson Carter and Amy Olson duo were the first of the night in this type of display, using the lyra to add to the rigid structure, yet unbalanced and uncontrolled movements of a marionette controlled by an invisible, sometimes sloppy, puppeteer.

Concluding the evening, Eppstein and Kocherhans took the stage again for “Under the Waves,” a mermaid-fantasy fiesta. The two swam through the blue waves of silks with a fluid finesse, although their dancing on ground felt at times like they were learning how to walk—perhaps intentional with the idea of mermaids learning to balance without fins. With the final drop that matched the crashing of the waves in the song, the piece (and the evening) concluded on what the main benefit of aerial arts is: daring to move beyond what gravity tells you is not possible, and doing it in a way that embodies the elegance and resilience needed to be protected in the plummets. Even though my feet never left the ground, the mere act of watching these dancers fly lifted my thoughts into weightlessness, as I sailed in my minds journey through the air with them.

Brinley Froelich is a writer who regularly contributes to SLUG magazine. For more on Aerial Arts visit <http://aerialartsofutah.com>.

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