

CriticalDance Women / Create! at New York Live Arts

posted June 19, 2018 by Jerry Hochman

“Together, Karole Armitage, Jennifer Muller, **Jacquelyn Buglisi**, and Carolyn Dorfman have 142 years of choreographic experience, give or take. So it wasn't at all surprising that their joint program at New York Live Arts under the umbrella heading Women / Create!, which I saw on the penultimate evening of its run, featured dances – one by each choreographer – that were accomplished examples of **choreographic craft**.

Created in 1991, Buglisi's *Threshold* is a duet, but it's so filled with dramatic tension that it might as well have been performed by a cast of thousands. I remember Buglisi from performances with the Joyce Trisler Danscompany in the 1970s at Riverside Church. One of the dances I vividly recall seeing was Trisler's *Four Against the Gods*, a takeoff on the celebrated Romantic ballet *Pas de Quatre*, in which, instead of performing in, and celebrating, the styles of four renowned 19th Century ballerinas, the dancers performed in and celebrated the styles of four female modern dance icons. Buglisi danced in the style of Martha Graham – and her performance enabled me to recognize, back in those early dance-going days, that I could recognize distinctive styles. Buglisi later went on to become a member of Graham's company, and subsequently to co-found Buglisi Dance Theatre (which includes many former Graham Company dancers). Not surprisingly, *Threshold* is to a large extent indebted to Graham. It looks, at least initially, somewhat like a horizontal version of Graham's landmark *Lamentation*, and it has a similar sense of the individual and the universal, and of emotions powering movement.

Buglisi takes this a step further: in *Threshold*, **the emotions on display are somehow epic**. Describing *Threshold* cannot fully relate its power. As the music (Arvo Pärt's *Fratres* and *Cantus in memory of Benjamin Britten*) begins, the audience sees a figure struggling within the confines of a rectangular swash of yielding fabric that had been taped to the stage floor. The sensation is of a body attempting to escape from a grave, or from some sort of cocoon.



photo by Paul B. Goode pictured Virgine Mécène and Kevin Predmore

Eventually, appendage by appendage, the body (performed by the extraordinary Virgine Mécène) does escape, and is joined by a male (an heroically desperate Kevin Predmore) who emerges from the wings – as **I recall, on all fours**. Together they navigate the stage, mutually dependent and in emotional and physical agony, with tinges of exhilaration somehow embedded – but quickly stifled. And even though I knew it was coming (it had to), its ending was still shocking.

I don't know exactly what *Threshold* is “about.” Logically, it's about the woman's death for some unspecified reason (war or some other act of violence; the death of a child; some apocalyptic event) and the man's hopeless effort to reclaim her – but the dance allows for far more interpretations than that (e.g., it evidences a threshold to, or from, something; an entryway that closes, or perhaps opens onto something or somewhere else, perhaps a different memory, or a different lifetime). It perfectly mirrors the finality of loss and hopelessness, and the persistence of memory and hopefulness, evident in Pärt's music. But the choreographic intimacy and complexity that explodes within *Threshold*'s confined stage space has a far more cosmic significance, even if words do not enable me to describe what that significance is. **Simply put, *Threshold* is a monumental work of choreographic art.**”

Buglisi Dance Theatre
'Women/ Create! A Festival of Dance' at New York Live Arts
June 13-17th, 2018
Press Excerpts



IMPRESSIONS: Women/Create! with Armitage Gone! Dance, Buglisi Dance Theatre, Carolyn Dorfman Dance, and Jennifer Muller/The Works

by Robert Johnson Published June 19, 2018

“The dramatic highlight of the evening, Buglisi’s 1991 duet *Threshold*, pays tribute to the choreographer’s larger-than-life mentor, Martha Graham. Extravagantly conceived, and performed with wonderful subtlety and intensity by Virginie Mécène and Kevin Predmore, *Threshold* begins with the sight of a woman’s apparently naked body struggling to free itself from a cocoon. Her face presses darkly against the fabric enclosing her, and then retreats. Then her hands rise through an opening clutching something that turns out to be her own entrails. The dance has just begun, and it’s already over-the-top. Then Predmore enters, on the prowl. By now, Mécène has emerged, and is standing downstage, unaware of Predmore’s stealthy approach. He looms over her, seeming about to strike a fatal blow; but instead what follows is an extraordinary journey. Predmore ferries Mécène back and forth across the stage in a variety of acrobatic poses that somehow manage to look natural. At first he carries her back-to-back; but then she climbs aboard his shoulder and dangles upside down with her long hair sweeping. As he creeps forward on all fours, she sits astride him proudly, hugs him close, swings beneath him, and, yes — she even stands on him. Their touch is gentle, yet their bodies maintain an orgasmic tension. At last, the journey ends and the couple subside exhausted. Mécène retires to her cocoon. Predmore seems to rage at her departure; and then slinks off alone.”



Women / Create! A Festival of Dance by women choreographers

By Andrew Blackmore-Dobbyn, 19 June 2018

bachtrack

“Women / Create is a dance festival in its seventh year that puts together four of the top names among women modern dance choreographers. The program presented a mix of new and tried and tested works by Karole Armitage, Jacquelyn Buglisi, Carolyn Dorfman and Jennifer Muller. **The four of them have to be on anyone’s short list for most influential modern dance choreographers. The strongest piece on the program was Jacquelyn Buglisi’s 1991 *Threshold*, performed by Virginie Mécène and Kevin Predmore.** It’s not just that the concept and choreography were so powerful. These are two great performers, especially Mécène. Each moment was thoroughly thought out and fully realized. *Threshold* opened with Mécène on the floor, underneath a translucent sheet that resembled a membrane or a chrysalis. She struggled under it eloquently before emerging to crawl along the floor, insect-like. Upon standing upright, she was approached from behind by Predmore. He looked like a predator until she leaned back slowly, molding herself to him, and took him over. She wrapped her arms and legs around him and crawled up on his back. The tone was partly erotic and partly a statement of female power. It’s a riveting work in which she alternately rides her mate, stands on his back, swivels to ride underneath, and then emerges on top again. Impressive on all counts.”



Seventh Annual 'Women/Create' Festival a Collaboration of Exceptional Talents by Bonnie Rosenstock June 20, 2018

“Jacquelyn Buglisi offered the remarkable “*Threshold*” (1991), with music by Estonian minimalist Arvo Pärt and riveting performances by Virginie Mécène and Kevin Predmore. It opens with Mécène trapped inside a white cloth, which she struggles to escape, like a metamorphosing butterfly emerging from its completed chrysalis stage. First, her arms and legs emerge through a slit in the cloth, and then her beautiful body. For much of the dance, the muscular Predmore carries the lithe Mécène on his back, slowly crawling across the stage. For a time, with each movement he takes, he reaches out an opposite arm and leg. They create striking variations of entwinement, she underneath him, encircling him, on top, standing. At one point they separate, but are never far from each other. At the end, she returns to her cocoon and he crawls away, an exquisite meditation on the circle of life and death.”



Women/Create! A Festival of Dance 2018 posted on June 24th, 2018 by Joel Benjamin

“ ‘*Threshold*,’ Jacquelyn Buglisi’s contribution to the show pitted two mythical-seeming beings against each other, the first a woman, Virginie Mécène, who emerged slowly and painfully from a cocoon-like structure on the floor to be confronted by a handsome stranger, Kevin Predmore who warily stalked her down a diagonal. A program note, quoting Rainier Maria Rilke, brought into the mix angels, beauty, terror and awe, all evident to some extent in Buglisi’s Graham-influenced choreography, but this could also easily be interpreted as a grand passion between two beautiful, mysterious beings—exotically costumed by A. Christina Giannini and dramatically lit by Clifton Taylor. The two dancers had the technique and acting down and were quite effective, as was the dark, dreary music of the now-ubiquitous Arvo Pärt.”