

Ferocious Beauty: All Roar and Very Little Bite

Pete Wisnieff*

Department of Biology
Lake Forest College
Lake Forest, Illinois 60045

Liz Lerman Dance Exchange's interpretive dance performance *Ferocious Beauty: Genome* has come and gone from Chicago's Museum Of Contemporary Art. The performance was given nightly from September 28 through September 30 and opened before a large audience on its first night. A cast of dancers as diverse as the dances they perform place the role of the human genome on display from the very beginning. A unique production, the experimental piece attempts to educate its audiences about the nature of the human genome and the ethical dilemmas that loom in the near future as imminent advances in the study of genetics come with ever increasing ethical implications. In an attempt to help the average audience member attain a better knowledge of a complicated subject matter, the group decided to present the material through both short video clips and long sequences of dance.

After sitting through the entire performance, I was left with the impression that the performance fell short in one of two ways. Either the piece failed to delve deep enough into the subject to make the performance worthwhile, or interpretive dance is simply too vague to successfully educate the masses about the nature of such a concrete scientific phenomenon.

Despite the fact that dance was not a viable way to illuminate the nature of the genome, the short video clips were to the point and proved to be very informative. Unfortunately, they were short video clips. These abbreviated video information sessions made up only a small portion of the performance and left the viewer desiring more. When all was said and done, *Ferocious Beauty: Genome* provides only a very shallow view of the nature of the genome and continues to present a decidedly one-dimensional view of the ethical issues associated with it.

There is a chance however, that I am wrong to jump all over this apparent shortcoming. Perhaps the presentation's lack of depth is intentional; perhaps it is intended to leave the audience wanting more, and thus promoting continued awareness of genetic research. If this is the case, then they have succeeded and the video clips serve their purpose admirably. Either way, the amount and quality of the information provided by the video clips is sufficient and cannot be blamed for the feeling of emptiness I felt as I headed for the exit following the performance's welcome conclusion.

One thing is for certain, however, interpretive dance is not a successful vehicle for educating the public on the mysteries of the human genome. As a rule, interpretive dance is intriguing and thought provoking; but, by definition, it cannot provide concrete answers. For instance, in almost all sciences, the study of genetics is extremely concrete and requires definitive answers. This is a need that interpretive dance just cannot fulfill.

The one saving grace of the whole performance is that the dancing is advertised. Throughout the show the dancers on stage move with a

grace that is sufficient to catch the attention of even the most skeptical observers. With impressive diversity, the cast performs a wide variety of dance routines, placing their dancing prowess on display for the general public to see. In the eyes of some, the fluidity of the dancer's movements may more than make up for the performance's lack of educational value.

On the whole, I believe that the creators of the show achieved the finished product that they had aimed to achieve when in the process of producing their gift to the sophisticated world. With that said, any viewer who should happen to attend a future performance with the hopes of gaining a meaningful educational experience should think twice before dropping twenty dollars at the door. However, for the prospective viewer who aspires to lay eyes upon an impressive dance performance, the ticket is well worth its cost. When the performance had ended on the evening of Thursday, September 28, this viewer felt that there was definitely no need for an encore.

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