

# DANCING BODIES SPEAK — “GRACE IS HIGH AND LOW”

🕒 AUGUST 15, 2015   👤 MARK

Dance is the language of the body.

And in *Grace Is High and Low*, at the Highways Performance Space in Santa Monica, outstanding dancers extend that language in ways you probably haven't seen before.

At the center of the action is New York choreographer Maria Bauman, who set all three of the evening's pieces. Close beside her is LA choreographer Marina Magalhães, who invited Bauman to display her work in a West Coast show.

Both artists are deservedly celebrated, having created companies that work across boundaries.



Maria Bauman, Nehemoyia Young

Bauman solos the title piece to Roberta Flack's *The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face*. In her work, Bauman has come to excel at displaying the way emotions and urges can arise from within and struggle to inhabit the body, fighting to find form in new shapes, new gestures.

Enacting the classic song of a lover discovering the layers of love, Bauman's hesitant tremblings, surprised spasms and half-hopeful grasps summon the viewer's body and wrench the heart. In the last 40 years, no one has sung the song better than Flack; in the next 40, no one will dance it better than Bauman.

The second piece is a solo by Magalhães, with no music, created for her by Bauman. At first, Magalhães flows silently around and through a minimalist set dividing the space that suggests the title, *Limbs*. When she announces, "This is a dance about trees," we laugh — she has already made that plentifully clear. But she adds a few more words, and a river of movement, and leads us into a moving exploration of boundaries, borders, aging and death.

Words play a role in both pieces — Flack's song, Magalhães' few lines — but they always serve the body's language. It is Bauman's body, bursting with new love's timid eagerness, that touches our bodies to tears. It is Magalhães' elegant form flowing up against, into, and at last through limits that makes us feel triumph ... and then mourning.

In the third piece, *Attend Me*, words (Audré Lorde's *Love Poem*) play a larger role. Ashley Brockington enters and conquers the space while speaking. Then she retreats; Bauman and Nehemoyia Young dance the poem in a long, languorous *pas de deux* while its words flash on and off a screen. Finally, Brockington rejoins them, and the three end chanting Lorde's "Black Mother Goddess" prayer.

[Unfortunately, the projected words keep pulling my attention away from the dancers, in a way that neither sung nor spoken words do. The piece breaks into fragments, and I keep missing things. I wish Brockington could speak the poem while we all watch the lovers.]

Words and dance also interact, in a way, in the evening's opening number, a pair of bright, brave monolog selections by LA street poet Karen Anzoategui. She does break into song, but her rhythms and emotions are so strong that I keep wanting her to erupt into a dance move or two as well.

Bauman and the Brazilian-born Magalhães share a love of *capoeira*, the Afro-Brazilian dance tradition. Magalhães has used it in her award-winning long-form dance story, *(Un)Bridaled*, and Bauman seems to have reached deep into its abrupt movement patterns to find her way of portraying the psyche's emergence in body.

Both are artists to watch, and *Grace Is High and Low* offers a rare opportunity to see them together. It only runs one more night — so if you care about the language of dance, you must seize this chance.

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*Grace Is High and Low*, choreographed by Maria Bauman.

Presented by Highways, at the Highways Performance Space, 1651 18th Street, Santa Monica.

Saturday, Aug. 16 at 8:30 pm.

Tickets: (310) 315-1459.