

Body Heat

This show begins from a moment where a couple is in bed. One of them puts their cold feet on their partner, who then recoils. The feelings about the other person may be warm, but that doesn't change that initial visceral reaction to temperature. These are the contradictions that inspire and drive this new piece.

Winter in Winnipeg is the perfect place to showcase this new work by Sontje Skabo and Lee Frketich. As we come from the outside we go through the shock of wind and snow to our systems. Only to emerge inside, where not all of us will be comfortable shedding out many layers. We are then invited to contemplate temperature, that thing which obsesses us constantly. This perfect equilibrium of what it takes to be comfortable. A symbol for other kinds of inner balance that frequently eludes us. Body heat, something that makes our lives possible, becomes an obsession throughout the dance

In a paper titled "On Key Symbols", anthropologist Sherry Ortner identified that every culture uses two kinds of symbols; the first is summarizing, for example using a fire to symbolize comfort; the second is interpretive, and that is what Skabo and Frketich have stumbled on with temperature. Heat is here not only a simple rise and fall in the thermostat, but a whole nuanced and very complex language we use to understand emotion, intimacy, connection... even just being present in the body. This is what is explored throughout the show.

Skabo and Frketich work to illustrate this relationship with temperature through movements that are clean and beautifully well considered. The power of the piece is that they play with reactions to temperature that are instinctual, the product of a reptile brain that can't *not* kick off a pair of cold feet in bed or flinch when someone is coming closer and touching you when you aren't comfortable. It hits something primal and real, because having a relationship with temperature is a human and cultural universal.

The begins with a solo representing extreme cold, Skabo held close to the wall like a child gripping the bricks of the school at recess. As it progresses, her movements begin to pose questions about the emotional state she is in. Is this just physical cold? Fear? Loneliness? Alienation? The ambivalence between emotional and physiological reactions is powerful and becomes even more interesting when Frketich joins the stage. The dancers play beautifully with the tension between emotional warmth, intimacy, and even just proximity. We can feel the temperatures warm up in their movements, and with it the emerging question of how much human contact is too much?

As part of this physical conversation, the two dancers trace movements across heat sensitive papers. The square motif on the glass draws to mind the image of children breathing on to a cold window. The movement across the paper suggests ideas of ghosts and the transient presence through life. The interactions between the two dancers are undoubtedly some of the

strongest elements of the piece, as they play with the spaces between them, increasing and decreasing feelings of closeness and intimacy.

This show is visceral. As you watch it, you will feel the temperature and flinch at the emotional changes. It is also deeply relatable. We all have our own relationships with temperature, and distinctive ideas about what is and isn't comfortable to live in. Likewise, we each have our own understandings of what we need in terms of intimacy and connection with other people. Unless we can accommodate and find equilibrium somewhere between bodies and extremes of heat and cold, it will be possible to coexist comfortably. There needs to be balance so that everyone can be comfortable. What starts as a simple play with heat and cold becomes a more complex and interesting rumination on how we can coexist together and accommodate the differing needs of other human beings.

It will be interesting to see where these dancers bring this piece in the future.