

Washington DC-based artist, Maree ReMalia, brought two newer works to the Three Rivers Arts Festival this year. ReMalia lived and worked in Pittsburgh for a short time, and has her own following of contemporary dance aficionados. In the small theater of The Trust Arts Education Center, an intimate crowd settled in for the hour-long show.

The first duet, *now is now*, was mentored by the renowned Bebe Miller as part of the Gibney Dance DoublePlus Festival in New York. Like most of ReMalia's work, the impetus for the choreography was thought-provoking and cerebral. Using local performers, Taylor Knight and Anna Thompson, the duet explored how we exist amidst "personal and global conflict" in a world full of contradiction and ambivalence.

Although ReMalia works with complex themes, the result is abstract without any message or heavy meaning. Saturday, the stage was set with two piles of what looked like colorful, translucent plastic bags. When Thompson and Knight entered, we realized the bags could be worn like a poncho; their hoods were drawn over their heads and the thin material loosely draped over their torsos.

The movement quality varied, sometimes stop-start with quick staccato that had a pedestrian vibe. They stomped and ran, Thompson chasing Knight and tapping him on the back playfully. But then the style would change, reminding us of the dancers' technical ability. Thompson held a shaped extension, leg to her ear, and Knight performed a sequence of sinuous floor-work while Thompson sang in her clear and eerie soprano tone.

There were haunting moments; near the beginning, the dancers pulled the plastic over their mouths, sucking in air with loud gasps. And there were funny moments; near the end, they struck a classical ballet stance with an odd regal feel. Thompson and Knight did a perfect job reminding us of the peculiarity in the human experience.

*Multiple Bodies Project* was ReMalia's second duet, performed by herself and Jil Stifel. The work is part of a larger project including multiple artists in many communities. ReMalia began her choreographic process with a vague prompt - the word "tomorrow." Specifically, the performers were inspired by sexuality, censorship, queerness, socialization, and more.

The piece began with a burst of rock music from the speakers and a brightly lit stage. ReMalia and Stifel entered in fluorescent tights and frayed shirts. To juxtapose the pop of sound and color, the two stood facing the audience, subtly grooving to the music with an almost imperceptible bob of the head or bounce of the knee. Imagine hearing a favorite song in public and feeling the urge to "dance like no one is watching," but exercising restraint.

The two continued in sudden silence with movement indicative of ReMalia's style - a grapevine-like shuffle, and a light gallop. Rather than coming across simplistic, the phrasing brought skill and organization to organic ways of moving that most would recognize from their childhood play.

What really stands out in ReMalia's choreography is her unpredictability. The audience never knows what might come next. In this piece, an uber-creative floor phrase was followed by a cheeky jazz hand. Then, the two circled each other with winged arms and continued in a unison phrase of perfect precision (without the use of musical cues). A bit of the opening section's movement also made it in there, bringing the piece full circle, but only for a subtle second.

ReMalia's work is quirky without effort, witty without trying. The choreography was relatable in its humanness. She and the dancers radiated confidence that comes from years of performing, but also from a high level of comfort in their own skin. Rather than presenting work *to* the audience, they shared themselves *with* the audience, an otherwise difficult feat that came easily to the four of them.