

# Wildman and Sometimes Poet

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His adopted name sounds like an exhalation of breath propelled by a laugh or a punch in the gut. Foofwa d'Imobilité, Swiss-born as Frédéric Gafner, has deep roots in ballet and in the movement and legacy of Merce Cunningham, who he honors along with John Cage in the US premiere of "Musings." The first segment of a three-part evening, this piece was a fanciful wander through strong, disciplined ballet and Cunningham-inspired movement, splashed with Foofwa's own particular jerks, undulations, and quirks. It was an endurance test for the audience as well as the artist.

Each of several scenes had its own character, notable at first by his verbal accompaniment of the movement – in noises, hums, clicking or poetry. Foofwa played a chess game of movement cross a white stage, with light grid lines. His leaps and turns drew horizontal, vertical or diagonal lines along the grid. Characterizing the piece as a "solitary duet," his partner was the light (designed by Jonathan O'Hear) which tracked Foofwa's direction and motion. He seemed to be keeping himself happy company, as well, a private smile playing on his lips. When he occasionally alerted the audience that he had messed up a complicated word sequence, it was clear that he didn't really feel alone.

Foofwa created his eye-catching costume, a brightly painted body with collages of flotsam. Big blue arrows trailed down his muscular legs, and his torso, legs, and arms were a riot of color. Watching his body move and sing, he evoked mythical creatures, a satyr with pounding hooves or a prancing faun. He transformed into a multi-colored creature with a beautiful entrechat paired with a backward crab walk. Later, his body sank into a deep squat; his vocalizing of "bums" deepened from a quick tune to a slow tolling and his legs framed an enormous body bell. As the dance progressed, the melting body paint smeared the white stage, papers pulled from his body; as his voice and lungs were impacted by the exertions of the movement, the vocalizations were laced with heaving.

After a crisp set of balletic extensions, Foofwa sang a quick folk song "Skip, turn, and tilt," then collapsed heaving to the ground into a blackout. In the long final scene, the dancer played with a series of toys – balloons, mushroom shaped pieces, musical media (CDs, audio tapes.) He played, recited texts, spoke to us, checked a watch frequently. The complexity and interweaving of ideas were impressive, but tiring.

The earlier movements were accompanied by noise and hums, later by poems and declarations, most to or about Merce Cunningham. The transformations were a cacophony of choices; this was not Cunningham's movement in its pristine clarity. Although a master of the core movement, Foofwa's choreography is anything but cool or removed.

(...) In addition to re-naming himself, Foofwa is not shy about naming and describing anything else in his production. The on-stage music creations for "Musings," are entitled Cage a cappella; his body painted costume is called Close to Rauschenberg's skin. His program notes include descriptions of these "titlings" along with several poems. The movement itself, from powerful clean physicality to torturous body slamming, doesn't retreat an inch: a challenge rather than an offer. The naming, the dense program notes, his urge to converse with the audience from within the piece and around its edges are among the many ways Foofwa yearns to reach us. In the aggregate, it is all too much – but, sometimes, through all the cacophony, he succeeds.