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One Man Embodying 3 of His Artistic Mentors

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There have been many superlative dancers who have been far from their own best choreographers. ([Rudolf Nureyev](#) surely tops the list.)



Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Foofwa d'Imobilité is among them, and to watch his current show at Dance New Amsterdam — I attended on Thursday night — is a peculiarly divided and frustrating experience. On his last New York visit, in 2008, he certainly showcased aspects of his disarming and sometimes phenomenal skill as a dancer. They are still in evidence today, and yet both halves of the evening were dismally tedious.

The program, “Foofwa d'Imobilité/Neopost Ahrrrt,” begins with “Musings re Merce John and Bob.” In the 1990s Mr. d'Imobilité danced in [Merce Cunningham](#)'s company; here he pays tribute to Cunningham, [John Cage](#) and “Bob,” better known as [Robert Rauschenberg](#).

Those three artists pioneered a form of dance theater in which dance, music and design existed independently of one another; the cutely precious idea here is that Mr. d'Imobilité is bringing them all together, actually embodying them. His body is painted and decorated in bright layerings that evoke the Rauschenberg décor for “Minutiae”; he parrots sounds and speeches from both Cage and

Cunningham; and he quotes innumerable passages of Cunningham choreography.

This ought to prove considerably more interesting than Mr. d'Imobilité makes it. He even quotes dances that only Mr. Cunningham performed during his lifetime (most obviously, the 1975 "Solo," known as "the animal solo," in which Cunningham isolated and coordinated body parts — neck, lower leg, arm and others — to suggest one animal species morphing into another).

You're never in doubt of his prowess, of his ardor as an executant, of his animal grace, of his marvelous naturalness. The tribute, however, feels adolescent and superficial. Mainly, it seems as if Mr. d'Imobilité were brilliantly illustrating someone else's intellectually elaborate but artistically trivial theory; at times it's even as if you were observing a supremely gifted but silly teenager mimicking his teachers once their backs are turned. The exercise never once turns into serious theater.

The second half is "Involuntaries 1-6." Mr. d'Imobilité's choreography for himself consists almost completely of spasms. Convulsions pass through his entire body; at times he's red in the face with his own exertions; elsewhere he closely evokes the tics, thrashings and contortions of intensely disturbing neurological disorders. He does it all remarkably — any few seconds of these solos would be extraordinary — but he never organizes his own material to sustain it as drama. You get the idea at once, then he gives it to you again and again.

Meanwhile, he is accompanied by two colleagues. Alan Sondheim plays a variety of stringed instruments; Azure Carter sings her own songs in a series of pretty frocks and petticoats, and even dances a

little. Both are entirely trivial.

Mr. d'Imobilité has provided several pages of accompanying literature. These cover his “conceptual libretto” for “Musings,” the wordplay within its title and his own name, his methodology and the inspiration behind “Involuntaries.” It’s all clever, but — like his name — damnably arch and contrived.

Foofwa d'Imobilité/Neopost Ahrrrt continues through Sunday at Dance New Amsterdam, 280 Broadway, at Chambers Street, Lower Manhattan; (212) 625-8369, dnadance.org.