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'A Rite,' Bill T. Jones and Anne Bogart, review

Allan Ulrich
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Jennifer Nugent and Erick Montes Chavero of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company in "A Rite," a performance piece by Bill T. Jones and Anne Bogart. Photo: Paul B. Goode, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance C

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The dance and music worlds' observances of the centennial of Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" are not over yet. Indeed, for some of us who attended the West Coast premiere of "A Rite" Friday evening at the [Lam Research Theater, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts](#), the festivities have scarcely begun, and they'll probably continue through time immemorial.

This intriguing, intelligent, insightful dance theater piece arrives as a smooth collaboration between [Bill T. Jones](#) (who has participated all week here in the 30th anniversary celebrations of the [Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company](#)), Jones' associate artistic director [Janet Wong](#) and [Anne Bogart](#), director of the [Siti Company](#). The trio welcomed input from the 15 actors and dancers from the two troupes, and the result is a dance theater opus of immense facility, as word and gesture flow into each other seamlessly for 65 minutes. Local practitioners of what they think of as dance theater could get an

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But then, Jones, Wong and Bogart are working with a whale of a subject. Although Stravinsky this year has inspired both worthy dances and forgettable movement essays, no one else has approached "The Rite of Spring" as a cultural icon. This piece examines the work's influence on society ("rabble-rousing pretensions" are almost the first words we hear) and the course of history. The age of modernism unleashed by the score and Vaslav Nijinsky's choreography generated a tolerance for unspeakable violence that led to the Great War a year later.

We learn that when a frenzied dance ensemble is interrupted by a costumed doughboy (Will Bond), describing his wounds in agonizing detail. What the collaborators are positing in "A Rite" is not original, but rarely has the connection between what is permissible in art and what is permissible in human behavior seemed so palpable. Later, with somewhat less success, we experience Philip Green's musing on alternate realities and parallel universes.

Stravinsky is omnipresent, but sliced and diced. The first music we hear is the final section of the ballet (minus the last chord) and, later, we hear its episodes in jumbled order; we hear it in jazz and punk versions, and even as a solfeggio exercise. The cast thrusts itself into spasms of vigorous and punchy moves, which end with group exhaustion, or they parade (goose-stepping, too) in chorus line formation. There's one bewitching sequence, with the dancers devouring space in retrograde, that looks genuinely choreographed. And we are regaled with variations on what we know of the movement for Nijinsky's original sacrificial climax.

The collaborators have provided a guide of sorts in this mix. Periodically, bespectacled Ellen Lauren offers folksy mini-lectures on the music, its reception and composition. I loved the orgasmic shiver that runs through her body when she plunks "the Augur chord" on an old upright. Analysis, however, doesn't mute the music's power. It makes the score an even greater source of wonderment.

In deconstructing and rearranging the piece, the collaborators dash our desire to hear it whole. But at the end, as the music issues from the mouths of corpses, there's a sense that this music really is engraved on the collective conscience. There's a suggestion, too, that the score will always, in some way, elude even the best choreographer. The spirit of "The Rite of Spring" cannot be quenched, and it cannot quite be captured, either.

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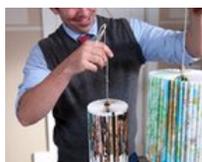
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