

'A Rite,' commissioned by Carolina Performing Arts, makes its world premiere



Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company and SITI Company



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A Rite

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The Bill T. Jones/ Arnie Zane Dance Company and the SITI Company combined studios to present a multidisciplinary rehashing of Stravinsky's notorious "The Rite of Spring." After some weather complications, "A Rite" made its belated world premiere Saturday night at UNC's Memorial Hall in Chapel Hill.

Anyone familiar with Stravinsky's score should leave all preconceived notions at the door. Bill T. Jones and Anne Bogart have taken Stravinsky and Nijinsky's masterpiece, deconstructed it, and rebuilt it as a completely new experience. Despite the vast differences, "A Rite" remains constant to the spirit of Stravinsky's work from start to finish and is ultimately Stravinsky's same work told from a dynamic new angle.

An immediate surprise to anyone familiar with "The Rite of Spring" is that "A Rite" did not start from the beginning, nor flow chronologically in any way. "A Rite" inverted fragments of Stravinsky's original score as well as re-orchestrating and re-choreographing, but Jones and Bogart went a step further by adding spoken dialogue into the mix. The three primary speaking characters delve into the compositional, metaphysical, and psychological aspects of the work in a very direct and thought-provoking way. The spoken concepts are reinforced, and sometimes even interwoven with the innovative choreography.

Both the physical ballet and score of "The Rite of Spring" were considered groundbreaking already when the ballet premiered in 1913. The grotesque movements of Nijinsky's style were retained through much of this new work, as well as some unmistakable quotes directly lifted from the dance. The companies succeeded in challenging the spacial limits of the stage with their fluid movements that seemed to defy time and gravity. The cast transformed the familiar "Rite of Spring" into something even more intimate by partaking in the music-making themselves. The notoriously jagged Auger rhythms were stomped out out, while some of the more melodic excerpts of the score were eerily sung acapella.

The ideas of rebirth and the cycling of time were made vivid through the deranged musings of a soldier as he searches for new meaning but is inevitably made a prisoner of the rite's endless repetition. This visually bold, and at times harrowing performance took the audience to unexplored areas of Stravinsky's monumental work and has secured real staying potential after this successful debut.