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Dance tops technology in 'Landing/Place'

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Dance remains the dominant ingredient **in** Bebe Miller's latest evening-length piece, **Landing/Place**, even though her groundbreaking use of **technology** creates a strong and evocative companion to the live movement.

Video projections by Maya Ciarrocchi, electronic music mixed on the spot by composer Albert Mathias and motion capture-based animation by Vita Berezina-Blackburn overlapped and melded into one seamless accompaniment to the five dancers, setting a tone here and sometimes a sense of **place** there but never overpowering the live action. Miller's experimental work premiered at the Drake Union's Thurber Theatre this weekend, the culmination of a lengthy journey for the choreographer, her collaborators and company, and a host of generous funders. Motion-capture **technology**, still **in** its experimental stages, has been much talked about leading up to the premiere. It surfaced **in** two ways **in Landing/Place**: as the basis for animation not suggestive of the human form, such as birds or clouds; and as slowly moving dots that still maintained the shape of a dancer's skeleton. **In** each instance the hypnotically beautiful images created a separate, new dimension to the piece -- rather like visual music.

Miller's choreography and Mathias' music are as close **in** rhythm

and style as two different art forms can be; when paired, they form one chugging engine to propel the work forward.

Miller's company -- Kathleen Fisher, Darrell Jones, Angie Hauser, Kathleen Hermesdorf and David Thomson -- have mastered Miller's rough-and-tumble movement vocabulary. They throw themselves into the choreography with the same weight, energy and going-for-broke power that are the hallmarks of Miller's own dancing. Their confident dancing lent the performance a sense of authenticity and uniformity, and reminded viewers of Miller's singular persona even though she wasn't onstage.

Landing/Place proceeds **in** many sections that flow smoothly from one to another. Projected images -- curtains blowing **in** the wind, birds swirling, miniature houses dancing along with the dancers -- recur, as do elements of the choreography and provide frames of reference. At the opening, a model house sits **in** a spotlight center stage. It is moved during the work but never leaves. It suggests the home we all were born into and left, the **place** that is central to our characters and our thoughts even when we are far away from it.

Miller ponders, mulls and **dances** around her theme but not **in** philosophical ways. **Landing/Place** is a multimedia symphony with waves of stunning, captivating images. But it asks no questions and offers no answers.

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