

CriticalDance

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Strong in the Broken Places: A Suite of Four Dances Addressing Human Trafficking

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Usually my Sunday nights are sacred. I relax at home indulging in quiet before another work week begins. But on this Sunday, I gave up my typically serene end-of-the-week routine in favor of an encounter with difficult subject matter — human trafficking. And I'm glad I did, even if my emotional tranquility was temporarily shattered. It's good to be shattered now and then as part of a shared artistic experience in a safe environment when the feeling of being broken is momentary. Imagine, though, being caught in circumstances in which your freedom is circumscribed. What if a relaxing, self-indulgent evening is but a dream, and your reality is something painful from which you yearn to escape?

Dance Place, now led by Executive Artistic Director Christopher K. Morgan, in conjunction with ArtWorks for Freedom, co-presented *Strong in the Broken Places*, a suite of four dances addressing human trafficking. ArtWorks for Freedom, a nonprofit organization that harnesses the power of the arts to raise awareness of human trafficking, commissioned the four-part dance suite. Actually, there were three dances and one work that might be better described as performance art. The artists were asked to contribute works around the idea of "Kintsugi," the Japanese art of repairing ceramics with gold, silver, or platinum lacquer to highlight the beauty of the imperfections and show reverence for the object's history. Each of the artists was paired with a human trafficking survivor who was able to supply a personal perspective. Shamere McKenzie, Executive Director of The Sun Gate Foundation, a nonprofit organization that funds educational opportunities for survivors of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking, worked with PEARSONWIDRIG DANCETHEATER and Christopher K. Morgan.

At the close of the program was *Gold*, conceived and directed by Sara Pearson and Patrik Widrig of PEARSONWIDRIG DANCETHEATER. You could hear crinkling just before the curtain opened. From the ceiling at the back of the stage to the floor of the front, long strips of silver hung like stripes cascading down the top of a circus tent (set design by Sali Treek). Five dancers (Tzveta Kassabova, Stephanie Miracle, Candace Scarborough, Patrik Widrig, and Huiwang Zhang), wearing black, move underneath and between the sloping rolls of sheen, which appear to be giant sheets of aluminum foil. They jump up and land with force, slamming the floor. They fall sideways, they get up, again and again, and the splat noises seem significant. A voice commands, "Stop," and the dancers do. It's clear the dancers aren't the ones controlling their movement, and the foil stripes are such that they create the illusion of being imprisoned. At the end, the voice demands the dancers to stop, go, go back, take two steps, etc. Each dancer walks gingerly on a foil strip. It's easy to anticipate that someone will keep walking past the point where the foil begins to lift toward the ceiling and it will break. Yes, it's satisfying when that happens. And it's satisfying when the dancer responsible for that break keeps walking, now of her own volition. It's, well, gold!