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## A LYRIC FOR THOSE LOST AMID THE TREES

By CLAUDIA LA ROCCO

If the world were a sensible place, Keely Garfield would have a gigantic audience. But it's lucky for those in the know that she doesn't (however unfair): her delicate dance-theater concoctions are best experienced up close and personal.

On Saturday night Ms. Garfield's "Twin Pines" concluded its premiere run at Duo Multicultural Arts Center. Audiences traveled through three floors of the charmingly idiosyncratic East Village building, moving up and down little staircases for the work, which was presented in two parts, separated by a short film.

"Twin Pines" develops many of the themes and methodologies from Ms. Garfield's past few creations, so that it feels like part of the fabric of a much larger body of work. She is an accomplished choreographer with a solid track record, and in recent years, joined by a rotation of stellar collaborators, she seems to have flung open the doors to some wild inner room of the imagination. How delicious it is to peer into this space, where fairy tale, domestic satire, dark humor and the absurd jostle uneasily.

In Part 1, "Stump," she spars with Brandin Steffensen and Anthony Phillips, while Matthew Brookshire performs original ballads and otherworldly arrangements of pop songs. The loftlike space is studded with tree stumps and evocative props (green hard hats, a bottle of milk, lanterns, a pink sleeping bag), and it's as if we'd stumbled onto an unfamiliar fable in which Ms. Garfield and Mr. Steffensen might be lost children engaged in an enigmatic battle of wills, with the stern Mr. Phillips serving as a mysterious onlooker and antagonist.

"Don't worry baby," Ms. Garfield sings in a ghostly version of the Beach Boys song. "Everything will turn out all right."

Like hell it will, you think, as an ax makes its menacing presence felt. Ms. Garfield's spare movement phrases, frequently interrupted, are just as sharp. Fluid theatrical vignettes blossom like clearings in an overgrown forest: Mr. Steffensen, wrapped in the sleeping bag as if it were a kimono, performs a ritualistic dance with Mr. Phillips. Ms. Garfield fashions a crown out of a gold hanger and greets Mr. Steffensen as if they were youngsters playing at royalty. (The costumes, a mix of street clothes, party dresses and more fantastical touches, are terrific.) Tenuous allegiances form and dissolve. The milk, eventually, is spilled.

The audience gets a breather with "Mulch," a brief film projected in another room as a sort of intermission. There are blurry images of Ms. Garfield, a bowl of milk cradled in her arms. Arboreal carnage is everywhere, evoking the aftermath of Brooklyn's recent tornado.

As the program notes, there is a long mythology of humans changing to trees. "Flesh," the evening's final offering, begins with Mr. Steffensen and the ravishing Omagbitse Omagbemi (a frequent collaborator of Ms. Garfield's) winding and tangling, as Mr. Phillips speaks of the body and breath. Ms. Garfield emerges, and more weary, charged conflict ensues. Might they all be changelings?

No firm meanings are offered in Ms. Garfield's world. It's best simply to follow and trust you'll be led safely through the woods.

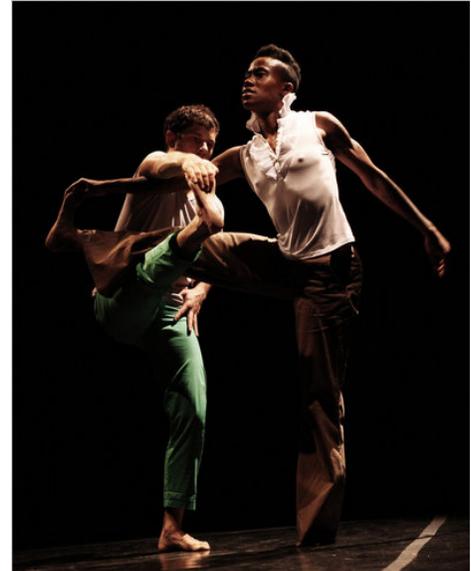


Photo: Julieta Cervantes  
Brandin Steffensen, left, and Omagbitse Omagbemi.