
REVIEW: Spacetime Dance & Human Landscape Dance in 'Topographies: Dance for Land, Air, and Water'

Topographies: Dances for Land, Air, and Water

Spacetime Dance and Human Landscape Dance/Katie Sopoci Drake
and Malcolm Shute

Dance Loft on 14

November 17, 2018

By Val Oliphant



Katie Sopoci Drake's contemporary dance style and Malcolm Shute's contact choreography intertwined in an exploration of how we interact with our built and natural environments on Saturday evening at the Dance Loft on 14. The performance ping-ponged between pieces by the two choreographers performed by their respective dance companies, Spacetime Dance and Human Landscape Dance, and culminating in an intimate duet between them.

The lights came up on a single dancer in a simple skirt and tank top crouching with her back to the audience. Her shoulders contorted, as if suppressing an imminent werewolf transformation. This was the first vignette in the *Awakening* series, all centered around relationships between cities and their neighboring landscapes. In "State Change," Drake's movements were fascinatingly minute — a hand reaching to pluck something out of the air, spreading and contracting her toes while her leg perfectly suspended in space. As the sounds of rain filled the theater, blue lights washed the stage and she splashed and leaped through imaginary puddles.

In "Petrichor," soloist Amanda Blythe infused a feeling of struggle and despair as she searched for something around the stage. She crumpled into a tormented ball, bent over in deep plies, and held out gnarled, arthritic looking hands. Drake rejoined her, along with Althea Skinner, for "Far Afield," and the three of them twirled

around each other like fall leaves blowing in a quiet night breeze, before repeating the isolated shoulder contortions from the beginning of "State Change."

Shute's first piece, "*Tsuru no Ongaeshi* (Crane)," retold a Japanese myth about a crane who turns herself human after falling in love with a farmer. Olivia Serrill, dressed in white, began kneeling on the floor. She dove her torso forward, revealing a man dressed all in black, Alexander Shute, directly behind her. Stitch by stitch, she sewed her arm to his and together they moved as one, arms fluidly flapping. They tumbled over one another without ever losing their physical connection.



We returned to the second part of *Awakening* with the vignette "Crossing," performed by guest company LucidBeings Dance. Six women dressed in grey and navy athleisure wear lithely danced around the stage, as sounds of a cityscape played. Slowly, the sounds turned to those of a storm, and the dancers were blown about, buffeted by winds. They collectively breathed, then broke apart into pairs, clutching one another forlornly.

As the storm surged in "Crossing," four dancers clad in bright green quietly rolled to the back corner of the stage. "Moss" looked at the transition from life to death, through the parasitic relationship of moss and grass in a Japanese garden. Two couples rolled on top of one another, demonstrating codependency and intimacy akin to young lovers as they cartwheeled, backbended, and contorted over and around each other.

"Pinnacle" brought back LucidBeings and Althea Skinner to reenact the juxtaposition of a cathedral amongst mountains. Skinner whirled as if atop a precipice while the LucidBeings dancers scooted themselves around the entire edge of the stage in a crouch. They all began to sway in the breeze, and the sway of Skinner's hips and arms matched the swelling of the violin. The piece ended with Skinner poised, as if to jump or fall, while all the other dancers surged together to stop her by clutching her foot to give her balance.

The evening ended with Shute's beautiful but thematically incongruent duet, "Eurydice," danced by Drake and Shute. I couldn't figure out how this classic Greek myth fit into the narrative of the rest of the show. In the final moment, Eurydice grabbed her husband's face and forced him to look her in the eye, the first moment they have made eye contact the entire dance. As he does a double-take, a look of awe and longing flashed across his face — it was a truly touching moment. In a world where many are glued to their devices, we are losing our ability to fully see and connect with what is around us. While not the message of the original myth, it was the perfect ending note for the show.

Photos: top, dancers Amanda Blythe and Katie Sopoci Drake in Drake's "Petrichor," photo by Beth McKee Elliott
below, Malcolm Shute and Katie Sopoci Drake in Shute's "Eurydice," photo by Ellen Rosenberg

Valerie Oliphant is originally from Arizona, where she studied dance and international studies at the University of Arizona, including a study abroad dance program in Ghana. She currently teaches pole and aerial dance at Jordin's Paradise and myofascial release and stretching for Praktika Wellness. She enjoys writing about movement and dance for her personal blog, [move your story](#), and for the DC Dance Journalism project.