



Risa Jaroslow & Dancers' 'At Your Service' a compelling exploration of power

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How do we serve? How are we served? Who serves whom, and where do the lines blur?

These are some of the questions posed by Risa Jaroslow & Dancers with musician-composer Amy X Neuburg in "At Your Service," a rich mix of dance, song, and text onstage at ODC Theater.

An immersive experience, "At Your Service" is staged in the round.

Dancers Emily Daly, Sydney Franz, Anna Greenberg, Kevin Lopez and Scott Marlowe greet audience members carrying trays of drinks, literally serving them. Pantomiming tying apron strings and pouring water, first in unison and then in canon, the dancers' movements, mundane in and of themselves, are transformed into something simultaneously beautiful and fraught.

Neuburg's score is lush, complex, and at times humorous (one song is "Superdupe Dude Man") and her vocals range from pleasantly melodic to growling rage. Occasionally, fragments of tango, circus tunes or sit-coms surface then submerge.

Interwoven into the mix of sound, melody and movement are compelling and poignant monologues delivered by people from different professions: Derek Boyd, a teacher from Oakland Unified School District; hospice nurse Carolyn Marlowe; nurse-midwife Arisika Razak; Anita Paratley, a battalion chief in the San Francisco Fire Department; Kim Klein, fundraiser for social justice nonprofits; and naval officer Emma Tookey.

Moving around them, the dancers underscore and accentuate their stories.

In a powerful segment confronting harassment of female servers in the food industry, eight additional dancers join the group, curving and contorting their bodies while Neuburg sings that a hand on the arm or "on the butt" are just "part of the job" to be endured for a generous tip.

Then the dynamic shifts, and the dancers transform into powerful, vocal beings, percussively pounding the floor and shouting, "hey hey!"; movement is connected to rage at social injustice.

"If I hire you do you lower me?" is another consideration in hiring a housekeeper. A couple (Marlowe and Greenberg) appear to lord it over their domestic help (Daly), who barely leaves the floor. A moving duet between Jaroslow and Neuburg meditates on the difficulty of serving art and family.

"At Your Service" is inspired in part by the One Fair Wage campaign, which addresses inequities in pay in the food service industry.

Jaroslow, a New York-based choreographer who relocated to the Bay Area in 2013, approached Neuburg with an idea to collaborate on a piece about service, instigating a year-long process between Jaroslow, Neuburg and dancers in Jaroslow's company.

Neuburg said an initial vague idea about service "slowly, kind of magically, turned into real art."

Jaroslow's corps dancers began improvising about what "service" means; each shared a personal experience. Lopez described being a barista, a receptacle for others' confidences; Marlowe felt invisible as a waiter for a catering service.

Above all, the dancing shines throughout "At Your Service." Each principal performer takes a bravura turn across the stage as Neuburg sings, "Do you see me?"

Do we see the individuals who serve us? "At Your Service" demands that we do.