Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Blood Echoes

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, August 5th, 2020

Often, films and other art works prepare you for their content by referencing it in advance for promotional impact, e.g. *"based on a true story"* or *"based on actual events"* and then cueing them in with a log line. When that happens I always go in with high expectations, and am frequently disappointed. So when a film comes to you quietly, only barely declaring its reference points with a few lines of subtly written content in the beginning before opening into what unfolds as stunning imagery and movement, it is extremely memorable.

Such is the point of departure into **Blood Echoes**, a gorgeous new dance film that premiered on NOWNESS' Just Dance series, profiling dancer Gabe Stone Shayer, who spent almost half of his high school years as a student in Russia studying at the prestigious Bolshoi Ballet Academy. In a few opening lines of text, we learn that in its nearly 250 year history, Shayer is the only African American dancer who has graduated from this heralded institution. Now making waves as part of American Ballet Theater and an ambassador for the acclaimed yoga/sports clothing line Lululemon, Shayer is using his platform to speak up about the institutionalized racism that exists in the dance world, particularly in classical ballet.

Blood Echoes opens with archival footage of a younger Shayer as a ballet student at the Bolshoi and the repeated spoken word lines of Daniel Hamm lifted from Steve Reich's groundbreaking 1966 score entitled "Come Out." Hamm was one of the Harlem Six – arrested, put on trial, and beaten as a teenager in March 1965 for his alleged connection to the Little Fruit Stand Riot, an incident that still resonates today with the Black Lives Matter movement. The film was initially instigated by Shayer himself, who, wanting to make a film about his experience as a black ballet dancer, contacted director Amy Gardner. **Blood Echoes** consciously references Hamm's spoken word and thus its origins to ad historical power to the contemporary nature of Shayer's struggle, and the film itself is a momentous editorial of raw emotion, light, shadow, and of course beautiful movement. The cinematography and editing are breathtaking, and seeing Shayer in shadow doing ballet barre only to break out of it with powerful contemporary movement and pure emotion is incredibly moving.

Blood Echoes is a sensory visual and emotional ode to racial struggle, perseverance, and the ultimate feeling of freedom and flight that every dancer strives for as an innate part of their process and journey.

Watch it.

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