

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

San Francisco Dance Film Festival 2018

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, November 21st, 2018

This past October, for the second year in a row, I had the privilege of attending **San Francisco Dance Film Festival** – truly one of the most comprehensive, well-produced festivals for all manner of dance on film I’ve seen to date. Now in its 9th year, the range of films from all over the world is vast and the active curiosity, representation, and discussion of new technologies for exploring, capturing, and experiencing dance on film at **SFDF** is nothing short of extraordinary.



Mission District

One of the things I love most about SFDF is the location. Situated in the heart of the mission district at the historic Brava Theater, the surrounding streets are teeming with life and being there always puts a smile on my face. Every block in the area is filled with colorful curios, murals, or mosaics, as well as people and food from a variety of cultures, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds. A small store front serves as a Spanish speaking church on Sunday (“*Que bueno es El Señor?*”), close to it is a home made coffee and donut shop, and scattered over nearly every block are an array of restaurants serving Japanese, Indian, American, Chinese, and of course Mexican foods. While screen dance is a specific genre of filmmaking it most definitely is international, and The Brava Theater is apropos because it’s in the middle of a cultural melting pot that is the antithesis of a highbrow locale.



Brava Theater

While the festival ran from October 4th to the 14th with only occasional days off during that period, in truth I was only able to be there a day and a half on the very last weekend. And even then there was so much happening that I had to manage my time and make decisions about what to see and what to miss. With screen dance fare from twenty countries ranging from China to The Ukraine to Paraguay, and formats that included looped films, film shorts, documentaries, features, and experimental formats including VR, there was much to

see. If anything, the festival is too dense with choice.

Stand outs for me amongst what I did manage see while there was the Saturday night Shorts Program which included the brilliant film **Timecode**, a Spanish contender a couple of years ago for an Academy Award in the shorts category which I love and have covered previously in this column. **Paloma** was another standout, recalling better days between a couple and their child in a marriage gone sour. While a little melodramatic for my taste, and more like a short film in which dance is featured rather than a film exploring the intersections of dance and the camera, it was beautifully and sensitively shot and felt.



A still from Timecode

A treat for visuals was the Chinese short **Gatha** with an amazing, spare and surreal opening, beautiful dance and stunning locations from mountains to barren countryside and sand dunes that told a story of two brothers. **Black Stains** was a powerful example of a dance film that melded documentary style spoken word and choreography to explore issues around being a Black Man in today's America. **Cipher** was another in which Bay Area dancers from TURF (Taking Up Room on the Floor) navigated various forms of street dance as well as local spaces "to create, innovate, and maintain the culture". These latter two films were part of section called "Raising Voices" that explored communities in a combination of mini docs and experimental shorts.



Gatha

But the absolute stand out for me was **The Great Ghosts**. Playing in a loop on a large screen in the lobby, it had me transfixed to the point that I had to literally and consciously pull myself away so I could get into the theater at all. **The Great Ghosts** features live performance capture of site-specific, movement and physics based installations at the Pantheon. Using four "spectacular apparatuses – trampoline, turntable, precarious balancing and her famous 'Seesaw of Levity', now installed in the monument – the dancer-acrobats, Foucault's pendulum, and the audience are the actors in a totally original ambulatory show." Aside from the actual equipment and movement itself, the space and scale around each installation lends an incredible grandeur that is beautifully caught on film. In addition to all the above I was happy to see films from some local and familiar faces including Kitty McNamee's **The Yellow Room**, Mitchell Rose's tribute to outgoing BAM's Joe Milello **And So Say All of Us**, Jacob Jonas' **Able**, and two shorts from Katherine Helen Fischer **The Specter of the Other** and **Vortices**, as well as many great international shorts I have seen previously including Adi Halfin's **True Love Waits**.



Paloma

From the location to its range and representation of all manner of screen dance, San Francisco Dance Film Festival is at its very core a recommendation for inclusivity and community which is in fact at the heart of what founder and director Greta Schoenberg had in mind: *"This year's selections represent a wide cross section of the dance community, bringing new artists into the limelight and celebrating veteran performers, choreographers, and teachers in moving tributes. Audiences will see how new technology is creating limitless possibilities for dancers to explore uncharted locations and allowing them to play with dynamic camera movements that were never before possible on an independent artist's budget. We will also see examples of activism through*

the arts, as artists raise their voices to express concerns about today's challenging world. All bodies, all dance forms, and all people are welcome in this space we are creating as curators. Our ultimate goal is to help bridge communities that span different physical abilities, races, genders, and sexual identities through the universal languages of dance and film."

More shorts that I was unable to see while there will be covered individually in future columns, but in the meanwhile you can get a taste of the full range of what San Francisco Dance Film Festival offers in their 2018 teaser or by reading about individual films here: <http://www.sfdancefilmfest.org/2018-films/>

Enjoy!

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