



Even the chairs in the Adaptation Project seem to have their own choreography. DAVID HOU

DANCE REVIEW

An inspired Adaptation

Adaptation Project
Choreography by Michael Trent
Dancemakers Centre for Creation
In Toronto on Friday

REVIEWED BY
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Michael Trent is the idea man of dance. The artistic director of Dancemakers is always searching for different approaches to choreography. His latest innovation is the intriguing *Adaptation Project*.

Founded in 1974, Dancemakers is one of the oldest contemporary dance companies in Canada. For most of its life, it has been a repertory company. This is the wellspring of Trent's *Adaptation Project*. He and his dancers have "adapted" an earlier work from the company's archive.

New York choreographer Mitchell Rose set *Following Station Identification* on Dancemakers in 1974. *Adaptation Project* is a 2012 reimagining of this work, aided by dramaturge Jacob Zimmer.

It's important to point out that *Adaptation Project* is not a recreation or a revival of Rose's choreography. Rather, Trent and his company (Robert Abubo, Amanda Acorn, Kate Holden, Benjamin Kamino and Simon Renaud) use the 1974 piece as their inspiration to create something new, with Rose's full approval.

Apparently, the original piece

was a light-hearted look at individuals and families. To be perfectly frank, the 2012 work doesn't seem, initially, to be about anything at all. What does intrigue, however, is *Adaptation Project's* unpredictability. There is a parade of "happenings" that pique one's interest, choreographically speaking.

Trent and his dancers have come up with what seems like a rambling scenario made up of physical movement both for the dancers and a number of folding chairs. In fact, the chairs have their own choreography. They are set in place, sat on, lain under, collapsed, and moved about the space. At one point, they form a seven-seat waiting room.

As for the dancers, they leap, jump, turn, spin, roll and crawl. They balance each other, and engage in dangerous partnering with both the women and men holding other dancers upside down. They form shifting relationships with the chairs. They seem to be in a state of longing.

Over time, one begins to perceive that relationships are forming between the dancers in a leader/follower scenario. Movement becomes a source of attraction/rejection. As much as they seem to favour individuality, they are inexorably drawn to each other. Duets, trios, quartets and quintets come and go.

Sometimes they pause to stare at each other in a group circle. At other times, they relax and watch each other. The environment does not include wing space so the dancers are always on stage. They may go off to the side to relax, or to initiate a new movement sequence, but they are always in the picture.

Some of the more amusing moments have the dancers presenting each other, that is holding their outstretched hands to the side, palms open, as if to say, "Here's Robert" (or Kate, or Ben etc.) One hilarious section has them putting on layers of clothing in rapid succession. They all

wear the identical number of items, but all in a different order.

For example, a long brown dress might be the top article of clothing for one dancer, and the bottom layer for another. When they shed the clothes, it's like a kaleidoscope of shifting colours passing before one's eyes. The dancers never lose eye contact with each other in what seems like a competition.

And then the penny drops. At the very end of the dance, a white curtain hanging in the corner becomes a projection screen showing three different sections of the Rose original. In these grainy black and white pictures, we see the dancers, albeit more balletic and graceful, engage in some of the movement from the *Adaptation Project*.

Here a leap, and there a jump, and now a spin. And yes, there is a chair. And that original cast was a powerhouse – Carol Anderson, Peggy Baker, Robert Desrosiers, Andraya Smith and Mitch Kirsch.

By seeing the original, we understand what inspired the *Adaptation Project*. It's as if we have been trying to solve a jigsaw puzzle, and suddenly, all the pieces fit together. It is a most satisfying moment.

The score is very clever. Composer Christopher Willes has taken Rose's choice of music by Lucian Berio and Lukas Foss, spliced it together with pieces of Crystal Castles and Blossom Dearie, and recorded it on an old fashioned reel to reel tape recorder. Guitarist Thom Gil is live playing Willes' original music over the taped score – a combination of old technology and new sounds.

All in all, there is never a dull moment in *Adaptation Project*. Something is always grabbing your attention in the flow of events passing on the stage.

Adaptation Project continues at Dancemakers Centre for Creation until Apr. 29.

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