

THE Arts

The New York Times

SATURDAY, JANUARY 8, 2011

The Methods Of Maleness, Kilts Included

When the five male dancers stood near the lip of the Joyce Theater's stage after the American premiere of Philippe Saire's "Lonesome Cowboy" on Thursday night, their bows might have been a continuation of the hourlong work's themes about masculine group identity and behavior. Here

CLAUDIA
LA ROCCO

DANCE
REVIEW

they were, engaged in another ritualized activity, beholden to its mores and seeming at once proud, nervous and pleased.

Yet though they were part of a socialized unit, they remained individuals — a welcome, natural complexity, especially given the simplistic heavy-handedness of the work they had just performed (and helped create). It's not a happy thing to feel you are seeing dancers for the first time only when the work has ended.

It could be argued that the whole point of "Lonesome Cowboy" was to subsume individual personalities in a thick murk of learned behavior and instinct. But these stereotypes are beyond threadbare: do we really need another gloss on the lewd, enraged jock or the primal male whose aggression is barely disguised by a shirt and tie? Mightn't we move beyond the tired dichotomy of men pushing one another around violently only to end in sexual embraces? And, really, must they wear kilts? Apparently they do, not least so they can remove their underwear and flirt with nudity as they



ANDREA MOHIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Compagnie Philippe Saire From left, Philippe Chosson, Mickaël Henrotay Delaunay and Matthieu Guénégo in "Lonesome Cowboy," which had its American debut at the Joyce Theater on Thursday night.

scuffle and tangle, grappling for purchase on the bed of dark gravel that covers the stage. (The design is by Sylvie Kleiber.) Her set, combined with Laurent Junod's harsh, intermittently pulsating lighting, gives the sense of an arena. As the men circle one another, casting handfuls of gravel at their buddies, it becomes a

Compagnie Philippe Saire performs "Lonesome Cowboy" through Sunday at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, at 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 242-0800, joyce.org.

schoolyard; when they moved into precise, slow formations with shell-shocked deliberateness, they might have been cadets in a military complex.

And though there are touches of humor (one man wraps his black underwear masklike around his face, once the kilts come out), the mood is as dark as the palette and Christophe Bolondi's boilerplate collage sound score. More than once I thought longingly of the color-saturated design of David Neumann's "feedforward" (2007), and of its adroit, sophisticated navigation

of many similar themes: competition, the fierce but fragile male ego, the need to dominate but also to be accepted.

But Mr. Neumann has a far lighter touch than Mr. Saire (who was born in Algeria and grew up in Switzerland, where he is now based). And "Lonesome Cowboy" is too tightly wound to find its way into any of the true ambiguities of masculine identity. Instead these poor dancers slog away, mired in an idea of a performance that is, in the end, more oppressive than the societal codes they seek to convey.