



### Celebrating Mandela Abstractly, With Video

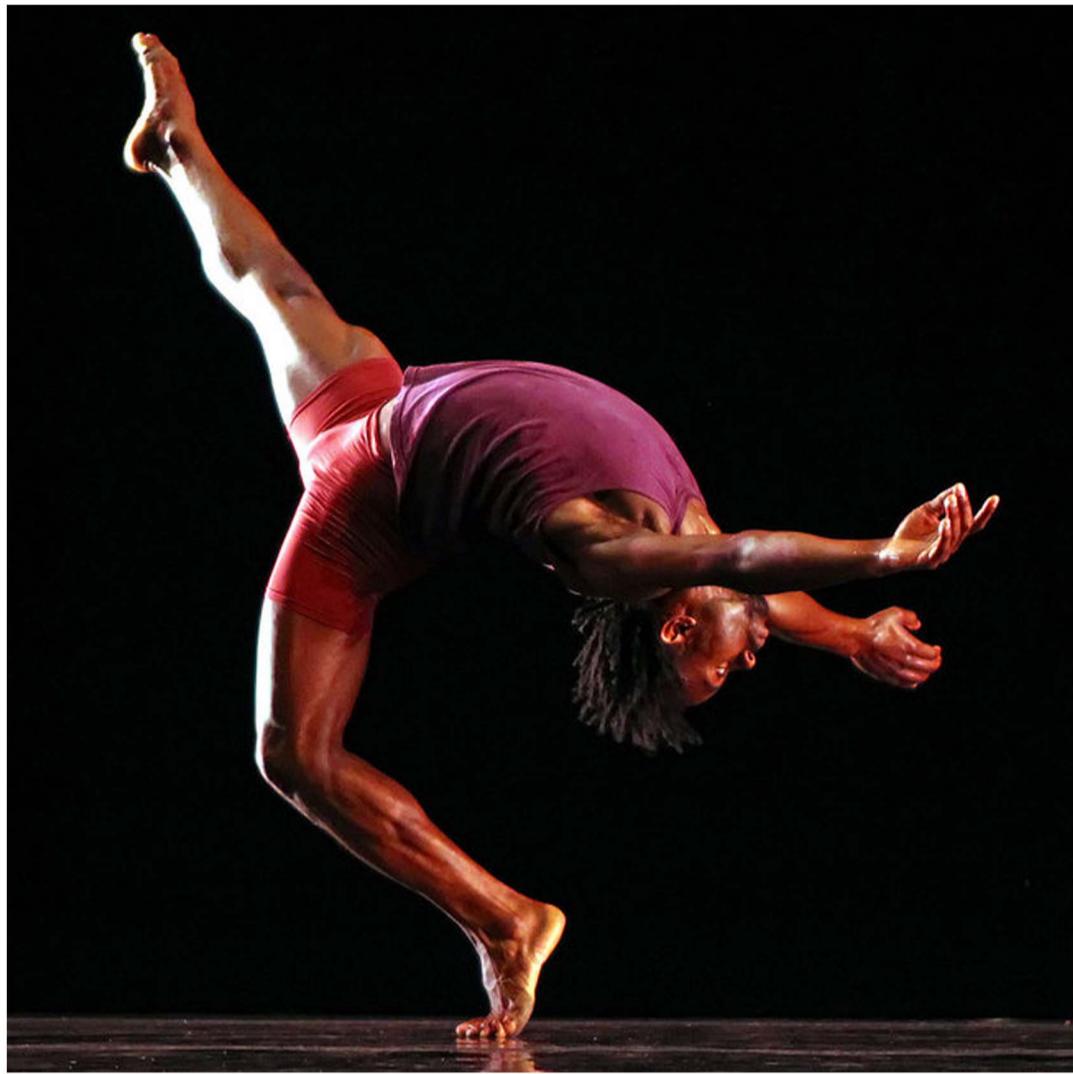
One of these years, Mariano Rivera's cutter will fail him. That great Yankees closer will prove to be mortal, and Yankee fans will have to suffer through ninth-inning anxiety, like everyone else.

**CLAUDIA LA ROCCO**

**DANCE REVIEW**

And so, too, will the fiercely liquid Norwood Pennewell eventually falter when making his way through Garth Fagan's exacting movement phrases. The choreographer will have to find a new muse, replacing the man who has danced for him since 1978 and is now also his assistant and rehearsal director.

*Garth Fagan Dance continues through Sunday at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, at 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 242-0800, joyce.org.*



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREA MOHIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

**Garth Fagan Dance** Vitolio Jeune, above, in an excerpt from "Senku," and, above left, Norwood Pennewell reaching skyward in "Madiba," about the South African leader Nelson Mandela, at the Joyce Theater.

Which dark day will come first? It's a gambler's conundrum. Tuesday night at the Joyce Theater, when Garth Fagan Dance opened another weeklong stint, Mr. Pennewell was looking as at home as ever. And yet he's steadily easing into his next phase: choreographer.

"Liminal Flux," his second dance, had its premiere alongside "Madiba," Mr. Fagan's newest

work. Like "Hylozoic" (2010), Mr. Pennewell's debut choreographic effort, it is a study in shifting, interlocking patterns. Skeins of dancers advance across the stage in surging processions, separating into changeable groups and pockets of stillness.

Mr. Pennewell knows how to organize bodies. And he knows these bodies: their strengths, their weaknesses, their inclinations, in relation to a very particular way of moving. (Really, for dancers like Vitolio Jeune, who dazzled in a solo excerpt from "Senku," and the ever-astounding Nicolette Depass, it appears to be all strengths.)

This has obvious advantages. But when you watch "Liminal Flux," seeing its similarities to "Hylozoic" and to much of Mr. Fagan's output, those advantages seem dwarfed by that evergreen modern-dance quandary: how to find a distinct choreographic

voice when you've grown up under someone else's? It would be good to see what Mr. Pennewell might do with dancers who don't speak his language.

It is a language of lusciously undulating torsos, strikingly geometric extensions and rooted-into-the-earth balances. (Audience members got to feast on this style — or, for those new to Mr. Fagan's world, familiarize them-

### Where does a muse find his own inspiration?

selves with it — during "Prelude," the handsome primer that opened the evening.) Mr. Fagan is a storyteller, but a formalist one. This is clear in "Madiba," which celebrates Nelson Mandela in rather abstract — and boilerplate Fagan — terms.

Madiba is a clan nickname for Mr. Mandela, and the dance shows a community in flux, swiveling between rejoicing and defiance. Mr. Pennewell might be something of a Mandela figure; he is often a man apart, separated by the choreography and by a small camera strapped onto his head.

As he moves, he records live footage of the other dancers, which is projected onto the stage's back wall in a hazy whirl of colored lights, reminiscent of a vibrant city at night. This creates evocative moments (and, on Tuesday, a technical misfire or two), as when his torso swoops low and the floor rises up precipitously, or when he gazes out at the others from the wings.

The chaotic action of the camera, especially when Mr. Pennewell is moving fast, often makes it difficult to focus fully on either the dancers or their screen doubles. This is too bad. The details are where Mr. Fagan really shines.