



DANCE REVIEW

Tere O'Connor's 'Cover Boy'



Ari Mintz for The New York Times

Cover Boy, a new work choreographed by Tere O'Connor, featuring, from left, Niall Jones, Paul Monaghan, Michael Ingle and Matthew Rogers, at Danspace Project.

By CLAUDIA LA ROCCO
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Tere O'Connor's new dance is an all-male affair. It is performed by four men, features only one woman among its collaborators and even has the title "Cover Boy."

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But the pin-up model I kept thinking about while watching this hourlong work on Sunday night at Danspace Project is the ultimate female sex symbol: Marilyn Monroe, the bombshell recognized worldwide, whose internal reality nobody really knew anything about.

It's perhaps not such an inappropriate association. First of all, there are always feminine shadings in a project by Tere O'Connor Dance, which is celebrating its 25th year. More specifically, "Cover Boy" takes some of its content and

structure from [ideas about otherness](#) and the closeted gay experience. And, well, it has long been impossible to think about Marilyn without also thinking about Norma Jeane and

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the painful truths about her that remained hidden.

The idea of hidden things is built into the set *Aptum Architecture* (Roger Hubeli and Julie Larsen) designed for “Cover Boy”: a giant pair of white mechanical wings that float above the stage, slowly unfurling in the work’s opening moments as the dancers enter with mincing steps, like dolls on a conveyor belt.

“Cover Boy” itself is full of ghosts, of feints toward things that are never fully revealed. These ploys can feel frustratingly coy, as when the dancers Michael Ingle, Niall Jones, Paul Monaghan and Matthew Rogers smilingly whisper among themselves, never letting the audience quite hear their secrets.

It can also be beautiful and terribly sad, as when one of the men stands apart from the group, staring across the diagonal stretch of the stage as if it were an unfathomable distance to cross. (Michael O’Connor’s elegiac lighting design enhances that sense of distance here; at other times he creates a flushed interior world). Or when the performers take up gossamer social dance structures, spinning through brief steps, only to let them dissolve.

These structures sometimes have menace at their core. At one point Mr. Rogers stands still while his three colleagues circle him like spokes radiating from a hub, one arm of each dancer reaching in to his throat to form a communal choke collar. He couldn’t speak, even if he wanted to, and his eyes stare out at the audience with an unfathomable welter of emotions, a visual encapsulation of James Baker’s delicately rich collage score.

“Cover Boy” is unquestionably an ensemble work. But, for me, anyway, [Mr. Rogers](#) is its finely beating heart. He is a mercurial heartbreaker of an artist — you want to protect him even as he constantly makes you question his intentions.

Mr. O’Connor has made five works with Mr. Rogers over the past seven years. (Mr. O’Connor credits his dancers with some of the movement material.) This relationship shows in the way Mr. Rogers shifts between moods and tasks without needing to broadcast his meaning.

The rest of the cast is new, and the other three performers don’t quite have this agility and can come across sometimes as making acting choices rather than floating through Mr. O’Connor’s states. But “Cover Boy” also forces them into over-obvious interactions, like the aforementioned whispering and periodic kissing sessions. There is too much theater in this.

Perhaps that is a purposeful decision on Mr. O’Connor’s part; he is, after all, playing with how we project expected, false realities about ourselves, and how the truths we tuck away slip out like water finding its way through stone, fracturing that stone in a slow but violent process. Finally, in the place of what was once a seemingly impenetrable whole, there are only messy, unrecognizable fragments.

“Cover Boy” will be performed again on Thursday at Danspace Project, 131 East 10th Street, East Village; (866) 811-4111, danspaceproject.org.

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