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DANCE REVIEW | MOLLY SHANAHAN

Invoking the Power to Shift Your Shape

By GIA KOURLAS

Molly Shanahan, a Chicago choreographer, begins her 50-minute solo, "My Name Is a Blackbird," with a speech in which she gives the audience permission to drift away now and then. It's fine with her if we yield to the urge to shift in our seats, drink water, glance at our programs.

Of such moments, she said, "I will notice them, but I promise not to interpret them." But there's a flaw in such an approach: little makes you as aware of needing to shift in your seat as being reminded that you are free to do so.

Ms. Shanahan's piece, performed at the Joyce SoHo on Thursday night, is inspired partly by the concept of transmogrification, or altering forms. In the work she tries to use movement to transform herself from the inside out, but the result is a meandering solo that explores impulses as they occur and reoccur in her body.

The dance, which features three separate scores by Andrew Bird, Mark Booth and David Pavkovic, also incorporates a voiceover:

"Here's a new superpower I was thinking about. The superpower would be having a different superpower each time you try to use your superpower." (Examples included the ability to inflate the body like a balloon or to be as light as a floating feather.)

Ms. Shanahan didn't look particularly heroic in a costume designed by Heidi Dakter: loose black pants and a flimsy top did little to highlight the articulation of her movement. Throughout the work Ms. Shanahan made repetitive use of false starts. Gasping for breath, flinching her back and undulating her pelvis, she darted in different directions.

Fluttering the fingers of her hand like a wing, a motif to which she continually returned, Ms. Shanahan seemed fixated on discovering a primal, vulnerable place within herself. But there weren't many distinctions along the way.

In this work the focus — to embody a state of performance — left out something more important: the state of theater.

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