



COLLEGE OF ARTS AND LETTERS
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To Whom It May Concern:

My name is James Morrow and I am an assistant professor of dance at Old Dominion University. I am a nationally and internationally recognized dancemaker who has been working in the dance world for over twenty years and teaching in higher education for nine years. I had the pleasure of sharing the stage with Kelley Schoger this August at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. I am writing this letter to share my experience with you, how I was moved and pulled into Schoger's work, and what an asset I believe Schoger is to your department.

Beauty, Identity, Release shows excellent choreographic cohesion and overall structural integrity from start to finish. Created to lament, pay homage, create a cathartic experience, raise awareness perhaps, build community certainly, and engage performer and audience members in purposeful, meaningful dialogue, Kelley Schoger's *Beauty, Identity, Release* aligns content and form on a variety of levels, aptly utilizing projection, voice and gesture, and modern dance vocabulary. The use of projection created multiple dimensions throughout the work seamlessly transitioning locations (sitting on a patio, gardening, laying in coffin, standing along-side a dying mother in the hospital, providing home care or hospice care, and even transitioning planes) as the performer ebbed and flowed between mother, daughter, narrator, care-giver, or soul/ spirit.

What is unique about Schoger's chosen bodily language, is how profoundly this performance interweaves semi-autobiographical narration, social engagement, even activism, within the artmaking and performance process. *Beauty, Identity, Release* relies on a loose narrative based on the death of a loved one guided by research and evidence of hospice care, chemotherapy, and an abstract journaling of the deterioration and connection to someone we hold dear to us. It can be humorous at times and ugly at other times and that is okay. Schoger in some ways gives permission to the audience to be ugly, to be vulnerable when dealing with uncontrollable life and death events, but not in the "everything is going to be alright" cliché. I see an artist saying, "*this fucking sucks and nothing is really going to help except time. I need to process this experience, share it with you, and if you are with me, we can get through it together.*" Because of this honesty, *Beauty, Identity, Release* has a purpose that extends beyond performance. It strives to ask questions, stimulate a performance inspired dialogue, and perhaps provide some catharsis. Schoger brings "the real" to the concert stage and she uses many choreographic tools effortlessly to realize those goals.



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The piece's first moments provide place, mood and tone, as a lone figure sitting on a chair with a projection of herself super-imposed onto herself. Sparse lighting and soundscape further sets the stage, the dancer turns to the audience and begins to speak to us while putting out her imaginary cigarette. Now making her way downstage the audience sees a pile of clothes. Schoger taps into the ambiguity. Do I/you see the light refracting across the back of the cyc? What are the multiple meanings stirring up in connection with gardening tools? Where is the audience transported with each individual connection to these items? Does the character evoke fear or compassion or ebb and flow between the two? What other emotions are fizzing to the surface? Does the viewer read isolation? Anger, desperation, defensiveness or expressiveness, exhaustion, all seem to surface throughout. As the piece progresses, the audience must reckon or empathize with the rising anger, grief, solidarity as control is lost, transforming the dance artist from victim to survivor and audience from witness to family.

I commend Schoger in her ability to stay transparent throughout the work. It is no easy task to dance such "truth." I can only imagine how her classes must be and how lucky your student body is to have her demonstrating such honesty and breadth of knowledge in her field and classroom. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. I would be happy to share more if needed. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

James Morrow

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