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Review: 'Dapline!' Demonstrates Gesture as Communication and Dance



Choreographed by André M. Zachery with the artist LaMont Hamilton, the work for six men has no sound accompaniment but is hardly silent. Richard Perry/The New York Times

By Brian Seibert

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“Dapping” could be defined as elaborate handshaking, but that would only begin to describe this kind of greeting, developed by and still largely associated with African-American men. Yes, hands clasp and shake, but they also slide and slap and snap. Something between a punch and an embrace, dapping is communication through touch, a dialect direct in its wordlessness but still rich in emotional nuance and gestural beauty — like dance. All of these facets are illuminated by “Dapline!,” a powerful dance that [Renegade Performance Group](#) debuted on Thursday in University Settlement’s Speyer Hall on the Lower East Side. Choreographed by André M. Zachery with the artist [LaMont Hamilton](#), this work for six men has no sound accompaniment but is hardly silent. Skin hits skin. Feet and fists pound the floor.

Along with an array of dapping, there are suggestions of riots, protest marches, bullet wounds and police lineups, yet “Dapline!” draws strength from its abstracted ambiguity. In one section, a man makes his way down a line of the other men, slapping each body from top to bottom. It’s a weapon-check pat down but also an inspection of troops. It’s both confrontational and intimate, the way that dapping can be both an expression of brotherhood and akin to the antler clashing of rutting moose.

That section, though, is equally representative of the work’s structural redundancies; each of the six men takes a turn as the pater. Nearly every other segment is weighed down by a similar playing out of permutations. Even if repetition is part of the point, thematically, the belaboring is weakening (as is the work’s slow-motion).

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Apart from a few brief, intense explosions of krumping by the dancers [Brian Henry](#) and TJ Rocka Jamez, “Dapline!” is disciplined to a fault and deadly serious, too, with no hint that dapping can express sly wit or play. But it is revelatory. Immediately upon exiting the theater, I ran into dapping on the street and saw it with new eyes.

On Thursday, “Dapline!” was preceded by a performance piece that takes its title from a [1979 Julius Eastman composition](#), with a title that flaunts a racial epithet. Jeremy Toussaint Baptiste reinterprets the score in waves of electronic distortion and elegiac piano, as Mr. Hamilton, who is black, sits a table in a white dress shirt and a black tie and stares at the audience before smearing his face with thick paint: white, then red, then black.

Though the idea skirts cliché, the delivery is strong. Mr. Hamilton’s facial features nearly disappear under the black, like a bird in an oil slick. His stare grows fatigued, incredulous. By the end, his face and shirt are a mess and a vibrant work of art.

A correction was made on Aug. 4, 2015: A dance review on Saturday about “Dapline!,” performed by Renegade Performance Group at University Settlement’s Speyer Hall in Manhattan, omitted part of the name of a dancer and misstated his surname. He is TJ Rocka Jamez, not TJ Hamez.