

# HOME NEWS TRIBUNE

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## *Randy James' simplicity reveals a deepening maturity*

By **KARYN D. COLLINS**  
STAFF WRITER

**T**he lasting image from Randy James' stunningly thoughtful work "Looking East" is of two figures — one balanced on top of the other, moving slowly into a shower of water. As the water cascades over them, they unwind from each other in seeming slow motion.

As one figure walks around a path of gravel as if in a sacred garden, another solitary figure remains in the rain shower, stretching upwards toward a shaft of light.

In terms of sheer choreography, it is perhaps the simplest moment in James' 90-minute work. This is not a moment of complex steps or tricky maneuvers. But it is a magical moment that lingers long after the rest of this thoughtful work has concluded. And it says something about James' growing maturity as a choreographer, too.

"Looking East" received its world premiere last weekend at the George Street Playhouse.

With "Looking East," James skillfully blends theme, movement, music, costumes, set design and lighting, soothing, tempting, teasing and sometimes assaulting the senses with a barrage of images, sounds and textures.

James' trademark physical brand of contemporary movement drives this work, of course. There are the

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heart-stopping aerial lifts and tosses, the darting moves across the stage and the turns that whip arms and legs quickly around in space in a helicopter blade-like blur.

But it's the stillness and slow motion moves, rather than the quick rush of movement that truly drives "Looking East." These moments force the viewer to focus, to look, to ponder, to discover.

It is important to remember when watching "Looking East" that this is a reflection of James' perception, not necessarily the reality, of Japanese culture after the choreographer visited that country. The constant flow of movement is to be read as the impressions of the culture to an outsider.

Some of James' movement pictures read clearer than others. A moment, for example, in which all eight dancers gather and make a series of faces (grimaces, frowns,

smiles, puzzlement) is unclear in its intent.

The focus of other pictures James creates seem clearer. In the tranquil opening, for example, the dancers filter onto the stage in an almost hypnotically slowness, swathed in filmy white garments that are similar to those worn in traditional Japanese mime. One man sits, as if in prayer.

John Lasiter's set and lighting design give an aura of purity and peacefulness with layers of white fabric panels framing the stage. A special white dance floor adds to the image. And James has even thoughtfully included a sort of Japanese garden, represented by a gravel walkway and pool of water at the front of the stage.

Jason Berg's original score, performed by his band Human Revolution, alternates between the soothing and full-fledged aural assaults with horns blaring and drums pounding.

The effect, though initially jarring, succeeds at jolting the viewer between the oddly opposing aspects of Japanese culture reflected here.

