

The Star-Ledger

REVIEW



ANGELA JIMENEZ/FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

Kyle Shukis portrays a violent ex-lover in Randy James' "5 Points of Discussion."

Love, hate and fiery intensity

DANCE

Randy James Dance Works

Where: Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St., New York City

When: 8 tonight and tomorrow

How much: \$20; \$15 students and seniors. Call (212) 334-7479 or visit www.joyce.org/soho.html.

BY ROBERT JOHNSON
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

NEW YORK — You want to call the police or, at least, shout "Stop!" and try to reason with them.

But as the lead dancers in Randy James' new "5 Points of Discussion" tear at each other, caught in a hellish and destructive relationship, there is nothing anyone can do. Like real people, trapped in psychic coils their friends can't see, these characters need to work it out for themselves.

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That James makes us care so much about them says something about the taut construction of this piece, which premiered Thursday at the Joyce SoHo in a red-hot performance by his New Brunswick-based Randy James Dance Works.

The choreographer zeroes in on the problems that beset his principals, Alison Rose and Kyle Shukis, ex-lovers turned vicious combatants. An ensemble of seven dancers disintegrates around them or reflects their fury.

When this choreographer's trademark physicality grows angry, watch out. Shukis throws Rose to the floor and pounces on her, pinning her to the ground. When he rises, he jerks a hand back as though extracting a knife from her flesh. Other pairs of dancers slam each other into the sidewall.

Typically, James' dancers don't hold anything back. They perform with an intensity that frightens, yet it is their dramatic subtlety that makes "5 Points of Discussion" so convincing. Tall and gorgeous, Rose has a dignity that makes her plight especially appalling. Kim Reis and Missy Pfohl Smith whisper advice to Shukis, their voices a hiss drowned out and rendered unintelligible by his personal, emotional din.

In a world as filled with bitter dances as it is with broken vows, James' "5 Points" distinguishes itself by giving the characters time to reflect and mourn. Perhaps they are inching forward on the road to maturity. As a counterpoint to the violence, dancers gently draw invisible threads from their hearts. Shukis clutches his head in disbelief, or solemnly regards something in his hands — perhaps a photograph of happier times.

The dance finds its humanity in such moments of helpless sorrow and confusion. "5 Points of Discussion" concludes an evening in which three shorter pieces, on the first half of the program, all contribute something to our understanding of the emotional thunderstorm that impends.

In a new formal trio, "Faith, Hope and Charity," choreographed with the authoritative physicality of classic modern dance, James illustrates spiritual ideals. "Heaven's Dust" pulls this handsome edifice apart in a duet of trembling and neurotic anxiety.

The yearning desire to possess another person, which appears in "Moonlight Sonata," is the real key to "5 Points," however. Here, Shukis smothers a delicately nuanced Pfohl Smith with affection. How sad that love can go so wrong.