

# Capital Fringe Review: ‘Finding Home: Dance Journeys’ at Cafritz Hall

Posted By: [Justin Rustle](#) on: July 18, 2023

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“Finding Home: Dance Journeys,” part of the 2023 Capital Fringe Festival at the DCJCC’s Cafritz Hall, featured works by choreographers Giselle Ruzany, Kyoko Fujimoto, Sylvana Christopher and Rachel Lawal with Vigorous Roots Dance Company, and Malcolm Shute, in collaborations with Alexander Short and Katie Sopoci Drake. Stylistically and tonally different, all six of the dances dealt with how to find and explore an idea of “home.”

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Both of Shute’s works, “It’s Complicated,” in collaboration with Short, and “Personal Space,” in collaboration with Sopoci Drake, were standouts. “It’s Complicated” set to Wolf Larsen’s “If I be Wrong” was a tender and poignant portrait of love between older men. Supported by Short, Shute rolled through one seemingly weightless spiral after another, always continuing for one more circle than you thought he could, before settling into a grounded embrace. Then on the lyric “what if I can’t,” Shute broke, fell off Short’s body, and dropped to the floor. “What if I’m just

an old man?” It was the only heavy and sharp moment in the piece, the only time where Shute seemed to be moved by a gravity. That break threw the soft and caring tactile relationship between the performers into an even more human light. The apparent effortless support for one another became an act of emotional support. It was an exploration of a tactile and emotional sensitivity that would be impossible alone. “It’s Complicated” was also a crowd favorite, eliciting more than one audible exhale of held breath as the lights dimmed.

“Personal Space” danced by Shute and Sopoci Drake was danced entirely on a small table, barely big enough for two people to sit on. Based in experiences of pandemic lockdown, the table—described in the program as a “crowded life raft”—created a free-floating, isolated surface in space which the dancers never left. Not even to bow. Combined with Shute’s original atmospheric score, slightly too astringent and anxious to be lo-fi, and Ian Claar’s soft lighting, the table melted out of space to become either an ethereal dreamscape or an ambient nightmare disarticulated from the plane of reality. This time Shute and Drake’s infinite spirals seemed truncated, always finding a perilous stability both constrained and supported by their table landscape. Every inch of the surface was used, with Sopoci Drake even hooking a foot over the edge at one point to give her the leverage to support Shute. Neither dancer ever reached to a vertical standing position giving the feeling that the table was drawing them down and sucking them in as it simultaneously manifested the space they occupied.

In contrast with Shute’s collaboration with other performers, Giselle Ruzany’s “Mané: Ancestral search for home” was a collaboration with her past. Developed from a tape recording of her Jewish Polish grandfather who emigrated to Brazil shortly before the Second World War, “Mané” was a stellar example of narrative, biographical dance. With police sirens passing the building outside during a quiet moment, the story of discrimination and fear felt eerily contemporary even though it was based on experiences from nearly a century ago. In an orange top and black yoga pants, Ruzany abstracted gestures based on the recordings of her grandfather’s stories as well as her own pre-recorded narrations. As she took her bow it was clear that it had been a tremendously emotional experience for her as a performer as well as for the audience.

“Finding Home: Dance Journeys” ran July 14-15, 2023 at the Edlavitch Jewish Community Center of Washington DC’s Cafritz Hall 1529 16th St NW, Washington, DC 20036. For more information about the Capital Fringe Festival, which runs through July 23, 2023, and to purchase tickets, go [online](#).

Justin Rustle is a performer, educator, and writer from Gaithersburg Maryland. He received his foundational training at Maryland Youth Ballet and has a BFA in Dance Performance from Butler University and an MA in Performance Studies from the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU. Justin has performed across the United States with companies including Ballet Arkansas and Bowen-McCauley Dance, as well as appearing as guest artist with numerous other companies and schools. He is currently a dancer with Dana Tai Soon Burgess Dance Company based in Washington DC.