

For four consecutive days, I got to be a part of a unique, ground-breaking and innovative performance that not only was aesthetically pleasing but also attended to current issues occurring around us. Us being human beings, citizens of America, artists, women. As a student performer in just the opening section, I was only exposed in the work for about 15 minutes out of the entire evening length piece. As a performer inside of the piece, it is hard to search for the right words to fully explain what it felt like to be a part. To some it may have seemed so scarce and momentary, but the beauty that we as the opening dancers brought to the atmosphere of the Joyce Theater was something that can only be explained so much through words. This beauty, however, was found throughout the entire process. I didn't come into this experience with the same appreciation and joy that I have now coming out of it. The road to accepting and loving the beauty within the piece is, ironically, directly correlated to the message of this piece entitled, "March of an Empty Reign".

It is important to keep in mind that explaining my experience requires a certain level of transparency. When myself and my three other peers were informed of this opportunity, we were ecstatic. To be performing at a theater, for a second time, that hosts so many other amazing and nationally acclaimed companies was an opportunity we couldn't pass up. We couldn't wait to start rehearsals. Although we hadn't heard of Donna Uchizono's work, we entrusted our professor, Brittany Engel-Adams, enough to accept the offer. Upon beginning rehearsals with Brittany, we didn't really have a clear understanding of what the piece meant or why our presence was even necessary, but we endured anyway. Week after week we learned what seemed like the most difficult phrases we've ever learned to date. We don't move our arms? 15 minutes of footwork? We're not actually on the stage? The entire experience slowly became a chore, an obligation because we didn't have context. That excitement we once had was slowly diminishing, but we endured. Although we hadn't learned the phrasework in its entirety, we still attended a few rehearsals in the city with the actual company members as well as the other student performers, leaving each rehearsal discouraged feeling as if we were the outsiders. Nobody likes the feeling of not knowing. Not only did we not know the full phrasework, but what does this all mean? We didn't let these feelings overcome the bigger picture of performing with a professional company while still being students. We endured. It wasn't until our last rehearsal before technical rehearsal where we finally met Donna Uchizono in the flesh. Her heart was pure. Her intentions were genuine. Her kind and caring spirit was evident. She sat us down and gave us the boost we had been longing for. As she went into depth about the meaning and intent behind the movement, my spirits instantly lifted. With the current state of rule by this country's commander in chief and his decisions affecting everyone else underneath him, it is easy to get discouraged but we continue to push. With the demands of an artist and all that we take on physically, mentally, and financially, we still move forward. Societal demands become overbearing, individuality becomes harder and harder to find, thoughts of quitting start to linger BUT we endure. It all made sense. Joyce performance week was long, but it was all worth it because it made sense. Experiencing the costumes and the lights, being in the presence of professionals, and working like a professional was the icing on

the cake. Everything was about strength in enduring. I walked out of that theater on closing night feeling empowered as an artist, a woman, a black woman.

The movement in itself, although not physically exhausting, was difficult in a different capacity. It required a strong awareness of the body in space and in relation to the dancers around me. It required a certain focus. Focus of the eyes in space, focus on the position of the body, of details in the footwork. As dancers, this kind of awareness and focus we don't usually portray but it is equally as important. This opening section of the piece showcased just one form of the idea of persevering in every aspect. Although not physically exhausting, the body was still extremely active, the mind still wanted to wander but we kept on keeping on. As we exited and the work progressed, the movement became more physically taxing. From the duet that displayed an exceptional amount of strength, perseverance, and stamina to the deceptively difficult solo that required endless concentration and dedication to the ending group phrasework that resembled a never ending dance marathon. Because of the quadrille factor, no matter at which angle you were sitting you could still experience the dancers commitment. You could see every ounce of commitment with every droplet of sweat. Every aspect of the work as a whole exhibited the idea of endurance. Even if the audience may have felt a certain level of uncomfortability or impatience with the work, we still kept on.

Walking away from this experience, I can honestly say that my perspective on dance has, once again, shifted. That is one of the many beautiful facets which dance encompasses; the beauty behind perspective and the way it is constantly growing and changing. Artists, women artists in particular, are strong in so many ways. We have the ability to make someone else emote like never before through the most simplistic movements. A look, a shift in weight, a gesture of the foot. The small gestures are often underrated, underestimated. Our ability to shift between subtle and flashy while maintaining technique is remarkable and has been overlooked for so long. Donna presented an appropriate piece of work that brought women to the forefront to showcase this ability; a skill we so uniquely possess. Sometimes we are intentionally placed in certain circumstances in order to sit back, observe and take notes. The learning process is just as important, if not more, as the final destination. Sometimes there is no final destination. That's when we learn to find and appreciate the beauty in the process. Thank you, Donna Uchizono, for teaching me a lesson such as this. To be a part of such a rewarding process was an honor and I would do it all over again.