



Veteran Choreographers Bebe Miller and Risa Jaroslow Write Mysteries in Motion

By Deborah Jowitt

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Risa Jaroslow's *Sixty* is also indirectly about the passage of time and the waywardness of memory. Jaroslow has always been interested in community and teaching groups of all ages and abilities to dance. In honor of her 60th birthday last year, she invited 60 people who'd been important in her life to send her ideas for a dance, and used nine of these to make 15 sections. You don't really sense what *Sixty* means as whole; its process is its subject. Most of its individual parts are resonant and engrossing to watch. What holds them together theatrically is mainly the performers.

From the moment that Gabriel Forestieri, Luke Gutsell, Elise Knudson, and Paul Singh enter with sideways, spread-eagled leaps—their bodies flying parallel to the floor, then crashing down—we're ready to follow them anywhere. We watch them fall and drag each other by the head. We listen to them (plus Rachel Lehrer) start sentences they can't finish. We see them perform *Plain Crossing*, an early walking dance by Jaroslow, while she, sometimes joining them, speaks of political and cultural events relevant to dates in her life (mostly from the 1970s). When one of six variously sized wooden boxes (design by Clint Ramos) is opened to reveal a small table and a green-shaded lamp, Singh and Knudson, in their skivvies, slide their bodies together in gentle domestic sensuality. And all of them dance magnificently—bold in their energy, tender with one another.

One activity offers a sly metaphor for choreography: Sitting on chairs, the five (all of whom are listed as collaborators) take turns setting a colleague in motion, like a wind-up toy executing a fatally complex version of pat-head-rub-stomach. Jaroslow steps in to improve on the creations. Later, they all set her going.

As in her last piece, the powerful 2006 *Resist/Surrender*, this new one has a chorus. A short duet with a book, performed by the choreographer and Vicky Shick, later mushrooms when pairs of young dancers settle down to read together and do tricky things with their books. Performers associated with Jaroslow over the decades help open and close the only two operative boxes, and join in a final slew of identical quartets in which the sole activity is "bending and bowing."

There's very little music, some of it contributed by friends or relatives, and it comes in snatches, as changeable as Kathy Kaufmann's lighting. It's typical of Jaroslow that she would eschew personal nostalgia on this anniversary and invite others to write prescriptions for a dance in lieu of birthday presents.