

August 18, 2014

A stirring 'Summer Soiree'

Amy Querin, artistic director of **NOCO** (and one of this city's most impressive creative souls), stood on the now-empty "stage" holding court after her dance company's performance Sunday night at the Fresno Art Museum. She graciously accepted the compliments pressed upon her by the well-wishers surrounding her for "Summer Soiree," but in a moment of self-deprecation, she lamented that she didn't have more time to more effectively transform the performance space into "another world."

I respectfully disagree. The space that Querin and her hard-working company created in the museum's lobby/atrium for the production — which paired members of the company with a Fresno Philharmonic string quartet — indeed had an otherworldly ambiance. The audience sat on risers, and the wall behind the performance space was swathed with fabric that echoed the billowing feel of the centerpiece aerial rig. The colors of the beige fabric of the rig and its gold-colored metal support beams seemed perfectly in sync with the nude color of the draperies. Above the audience hung dozens of paper origami birds. The effect was muted and ethereal — a refined, stylish atmosphere.

It was entrancing.

So was getting to watch dance paired with live music. The string quartet gave a stirring version of Kevin Volans' "White Man Sleeps," whose "wild meters," as Querin describes them, meshed well with the robust choreography.

Adding a poignant touch of the evening: Querin's farewell to Jackie Aldern, the assistant director, and Hannah Cavallaro, the rehearsal director. They're the company's last two original company members. A new NOCO generation has begun.

Best of all was the overall world that Querin — helped by gobs of people, including Fresno Phil executive director Stephen Wilson — helped create. For a few hours on a Sunday evening, it was as if the museum were transformed into an elegant oasis — a sophisticated cultural buzz-spot filled with people who want the local arts scene to just keep getting better. That's a world worth believing in.

