

## Keigwin + Company at Annenberg

# Straightforward and unpretentious, but is it art?

Gary L. Day

November 26, 2013 in *Dance*

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The endless argument about the relative value of “high” or “serious” art vs. “popular culture” or (most condescendingly) “mere entertainment” is familiar to all of us. There’s no crime in being popular entertainment; conversely, serious art can often descend into pretentious snobbery. In the end, the only relevant questions should be: How good is it? And does it succeed at what it attempts to do?



**Keigwin knows how to push an audience's buttons.**

Those questions most certainly must be applied to Keigwin + Company, Dance Celebration’s latest modern dance presentation at the Annenberg Center.

The company’s artistic director, Larry Keigwin, clearly aims for a pop cultural response. His work is straightforward, unpretentious and appeals to a mainstream sensibility. As such, it should be judged on the basis of its intentions. Does it appeal to its targeted mainstream audience? Judging from the enthusiastic reaction of the audience at the performance I attended, I’d say yes.

### Vivaldi and Sinatra

My own reaction, however, was somewhat less sanguine. I found the presentation deeply flawed, and consequently less successful than it could have been.

Larry Keigwin usually choreographs to popular music, both classical and contemporary but all recognizable. This program featured Vivaldi, Aretha Franklin and Roy Orbison, as well as an entire section set to Frank Sinatra. No one’s musical palate was expanded at *this* show.

The dancers were an attractive and talented group— better than their material. The three male members were well featured in a short homoerotic piece called *Three Way*, while the women acquitted themselves well in the female-centric *Girls*, featuring the Sinatra soundtrack. These two pieces proved to be the high points of the evening.

### Cutesy and trite

Elsewhere, the choreography often edged into obviousness and repetition. To be sure, numerous bits sprinkled throughout were meant to be clever, and the audience responded with appropriate delight; but I found them cutesy and even sometimes trite. Breaking the fourth wall and mugging at the audience may elicit the desired laugh, but it can just as easily be intrusive and pandering. Something is either humorous or it’s not, but one should never milk it for a laugh.

And it’s been a while since I’ve seen a show as poorly lit as this one. Burke Wilmore’s lights were drab and unimaginative, and the frequent use of harsh, unfiltered white light made the dancers appear sallow, haggard and altogether unattractive. I doubt that that was the intent, but there it was.

Overall, I can’t say I enjoyed the program very much— but that could have been partly because much of the time I was squinting, and wondering what this charming troupe might have looked like in a more flattering setting.

More in *Dance*

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The Annenberg audience loved Larry Keigwin's pop-oriented dance troupe. I, on the other hand, found the presentation deeply flawed. Atrocious lighting didn't help.

#### WHAT, WHEN, WHERE

Keigwin + Company. December 21-23, 2013 at Annenberg Center, 3680 Walnut St. (215) 898.3910 or [www.annenbergcenter.org](http://www.annenbergcenter.org).

#### ABOUT GARY L. DAY



Gary L. Day is a produced playwright who lives in Center City Philadelphia.

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