



## **Tero Saarinen Company** ***Borrowed Light***

Northern Light  
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In misty white light, eight men and seven women in flowing black dresses and coats sit stoically along the periphery, while a single woman, caught in a cone of piercing light, dances with her back to us in total silence and with weighty assertiveness; her restrained gestures occasionally leak traces of passion with handclaps and stamping of her heavy shoes.

Gradually, other members of the group join in, and the silence is broken by a rich soprano voice singing "In Yonder Valley," a Shaker song.

Inspired by Shaker culture of the late 19th-century religious sect after viewing Doris Humphrey's 1931 modern dance classic "The Shakers," Finnish choreographer Tero Saarinen created "Borrowed Light" in 2004. It was previously seen in the US at the 2006 Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival and was part of BAM's 25th Anniversary Next Wave Festival this year, November 6-10.

The dancing is accompanied by 20 Shaker songs, unearthed and arranged by Joel Cohen for the Boston Camerata, the early music group he directs. The singers are fully integrated into the dancing, moving quite actively with them as they sing. The choral pieces are sung largely in unison, like modern-day Gregorian chants. Titles like "Repentance," "Solemn Song," and "Fall on the Rock" resonate with righteous authority.

Even when the lyrics are nonsense syllables, their implicit frivolity is tempered by austerity. The acoustic voices resonate in the BAM Howard Gilman Opera House.

Rhythmically intricate clapping and stamping motifs, done in simple geometric patterns - crisscrossing diagonal lines, circles, and rectangles - with ungainly, weighted, and angular gestures draw a riveting portrait of a close-knit, yet emotionally reticent community. A delicate gestural solo to the familiar "Simple Gifts," a combative but not hostile, bare-chested men's duet, and a line-up of all 16 performers, backs to the audience, linking arms in mutual support, burn into memory.

The dance takes place in a sacred space, bounded on one side by a sheer wall and ascending platforms on the other two, all ten feet high, giving the sense of a subterranean room - a root cellar or even a bomb shelter. The all-black costumes by Erika Turunen in fabrics of various weights and textures completely cover the dancers' bodies except for cutout backs in the women's dresses and bare chests exposed beneath the men's full-length frock coats. The garments fly like condors' wings about them as they dance.

Kunttu's astonishing lighting enhances Saarinen's strong choreographic architecture. Beams of white light transform the space from misty obscurity to searing brightness. A strip of sky at the rear sometimes glows, symbolizing the borrowed light of the title; Shaker homes were built with windows into interior rooms to extend daylight by borrowing it from rooms on the perimeter.

Saarinen's choreographic voice rings loud and very clear, putting one in mind of great contemporary dance makers like Jiri Kylian, Angelin Preljocaj, and William Forsythe, whose work transcends craft to touch the soul. After this, my first sampling of Saarinen's eloquent choreographic gifts, I'm eager for another taste.