

Rocking Out



Frédéric Gravel on what makes his solo tick

Interview: Philip Szporer

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“Fear and Greed”, the most recent piece by Montreal-based choreographer Frédéric Gravel, is a spectacular fusion between a solo dance show and a rock concert. Gravel speaks with dance writer and filmmaker Philip Szporer about the inner workings of the performance and tackling notions of fear and greed.

Philipp Szporer: What’s your appreciation of both performing and creating a solo?

Frédéric Gravel: We imagine a solo as some ultimate form of dancing. If you’re a soloist, you are brought out front. There’s no way out, there’s nobody to help you. Being alone with the problems of performing and finding solutions is interesting. Witnessing somebody struggle and work on this is what I want to see on stage.

PS: “Fear and Greed” is presented as a concert, so is it really a solo?

FG: Yes, it’s a solo and there’s a band playing, so I don’t feel that alone, but in my imagining of the show, I was alone. It’s precious and humbling being able to witness a solo. When I’m in the audience, I have lots of empathy [for the performer] because I know the work behind it. You imagine all of the other audience members’ thoughts and feelings, which is really different than when you’re on stage feeling the audience. In creation, I was imagining that guy creating a solo for himself. Imagining a band, imagining an audience, so being more than totally alone. I’m pretending, like a kid, and performing for the sake of playing.

PS: There’s a fundamental intimacy about a solo. The audience is focused on you.

FG: That’s what I like. I allow silences and clumsiness; I allow searching and the time it takes to find things. Maybe we forget a bit that it’s all directed or written. This show is mostly improvised, but at the same time, it is improvised

Frédéric Gravel

in a precise manner with an order of tasks.

PS: You have immense charisma on stage. People connect with that clumsiness, as you describe it. There’s an uncertainty, a questioning that is very present.

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I’m here to be totally uncertain.*

FG: Yes, but it’s not easy to accomplish. It’s not just about being clumsy or showing clumsiness, it’s about being clumsy while doing something very precise. That’s different. I need to accept that I have to react to whatever happens and I might not be happy with that choice. In this show, I’m not exactly talking to the audience; I’m talking to myself. I’m trying to be sincere, which is a hard thing when everything is fake on a stage. I want to deconstruct and reconstruct the way I see myself. I’m not here to be certain. I’m here to be totally uncertain. Those questions are in my body, in my flesh, in my muscles. How do I dance being in this moment while I don’t feel like affirming that much? Sometimes, I’ll say something new and my punchline isn’t working and I’m like, okay, that was wrong. If you allow reactions, on the spot, there’ll be an intimacy to your research. It may not be as good as you want it to be and that’s part of the work.

PS: Every day people are tangibly confronting fear and greed, aren’t they?

FG: The non-poetic part is that fear and greed are an index for what drives the stock market. When people are fearful, the markets go down. When people get greedy, markets go up. Economics is psychology. Fear and greed are driving the climate crisis. Let’s acknowledge that. It’s in all of us. It’s profound how this logic is related to macro-economic, political, and environmental problems. And it connects to personal ambitions. As an artist, I can really feel that.

PS: You’re this very thoughtful expressive guy of 43 years old. What were you like, and what were your inspirations, as a kid?

FG: As a kid, I was shy. My mom is a dance teacher. I was doing shows, dancing, and that was okay, but I was not that happy being the center of attention. That’s not what I was striving for. I wanted to play music. I was impressed by big rock bands and concerts. I was really drawn to the power and energy of it. I was picturing myself being a rock star, but never thought I would be doing that. I’m actually kind of a shy guy. But when I’m on stage, it doesn’t show because it feels like I’m all assured. It’s a space of permission. You have to take the stage and just do your thing. It’s kind of frightening, and at the same time it’s a privilege. 🗨

Frédéric Gravel
Fear and Greed
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