

Dancing with Siri: ‘Her Name is Isaac’ by dance company The Three Yells

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“Her Name is Isaac,” by dance company The Three Yells at Cornish Playhouse, involves matrilineal societies in India and the voice of Apple’s Siri.

“Her Name is Isaac” by dance company The Three Yells – with a cameo by Apple’s Siri – deals with tech, gender and matrilineal societies in India.

By [Melody Datz Hansen](#)
Special to The Seattle Times

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“Her Name is Isaac,” a multimedia-dance performance by Seattle company The Three Yells, begins before the audience even sits down.

As described by Three Yells artistic director Veronica Lee-Baik, a single dancer stands alone onstage with tentacles peeking out from beneath a flowing skirt while a revolving series of abstract images are projected onto the walls around her.

The disembodied voice of Apple’s Siri repeats the definition of “Isaac” (which means “the chosen one” in Hebrew) and a group of semi-naked dancers appears onstage, streams of red running down their chests to symbolize menstruation.

Lee-Baik describes “Her Name is Isaac,” which opens on Thursday, Feb. 11, as an interrogation of gender roles and the experience of Asian women “living in a man’s world.”

The inspiration for “Isaac,” she said, came from learning about matrilineal societies in the Indian state of Meghalaya through the work of German photographer Karolin Kluppel and her series “Madchenland.”

“I wanted to explore what my life as a woman would be if I had grown up with this (less patriarchal) lens,” Lee-Baik said. “I want to show that women can do really physical and athletic movement, and so it gets dirty and physical, but also incorporates femininity.”

Some of the movements of the seven dancers in “Isaac” reflect this feminine strength, while other sections are dark reminders of moments of weakness and terror. Video clips from “Isaac” highlight dancers’ slow placement of feet on the floor with backs bent over as if carrying heavy burdens while mapping a graceful, deliberate path across the stage.

One moment reveals a woman alone, sliding slowly down the back wall of the stage. Other movements, Lee-Baik says, will illustrate cultural practices that inhibit women’s bodies, such as the centuries-old Chinese practice of binding women’s feet to mark their place in the upper echelons of society – which still occurs today in some forms, including contemporary plastic-surgery techniques (known as “Cinderella procedures”) that mold women’s feet to fit into high heels.

“Isaac” was a highly collaborative project between Lee-Baik, the seven dancers, lighting designer Meg Fox, media artist Robert Campbell, and composers Brendan Hogan and Fritz Rodriguez. In one section, sounds created by the dancers’ movements are recorded by a set of microphones placed on the stage, then distorted and replayed.

“When I collapse onstage, my movement activates a sound from little microphones,” said dancer Hayley Shannon. “So if you jump or collapse, that movement triggers a sound, the microphone picks it up and amplifies it for a big, extended vibrating note.”

It was important to Lee-Baik that the sound and visuals accompanying her choreography receive as much attention as the physical movement.

“I don’t want to be identified only as a choreographer,” said Lee-Baik, who studied art as well as choreography in her native Singapore. “For a work of art to be innovative, you have to embrace all other aspects of the arts in order to make a work whole.”

Dance preview

The Three Yells: ‘Her Name is Isaac’

8 p.m. Feb. 11-12, Cornish Playhouse at Seattle Center, Seattle; \$10-\$20 (800-838-3006 or [brownpaperickets.com](#)).

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