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## Projecting 'Portraits'

David Michalek thinks outside the box (and the walls) at Lincoln Center

By Susan Reiter



Eric Dyer (seated), Mark Jaynes, Maggie Hoffman, Erin Douglass, Kourtney Rutherford (seated) and Jim Findlay in *Portraits in Dramatic Time*. / photo by Mark Stephen Kornbluth

By all means, buy your tickets to the rich and international array of Lincoln Center Festival offerings that will keep theaters busy this month. But one of the festival's highlights is available without charge and offers a unique experience nightly once darkness falls. *Portraits in Dramatic Time*, David Michalek's latest outdoor video installation, projects brief performances by a wide array of theater artists on a vast screen on the façade of the David H. Koch Theater. Each individual or group "portrait" is a miniature in extreme slow motion, a momentary dramatic narrative of 10 to 15 seconds which Michalek has filmed using ultra high-speed, high-definition cameras, and shown in extreme slow motion so that the action lasts as long as 10 minutes.

For those who experienced *Slow Dancing*, Michalek's masterful 2007 installation that drew huge crowds to the plaza nightly, this will sound somewhat familiar. That project featured three side-by-side screens on the same theater's façade, each with a dancer performing a movement sequence in extreme slow motion. For *Portraits*, viewers will have a single image on which to concentrate, projected on a much larger space—85 feet by 45 feet.

For *Slow Dancing*, Michalek meticulously sought out dancers representing as many techniques, styles and cultures as possible. On his screens, classical Indian dance rubbed shoulders with hip-hop performers, eminent ballerinas with legendary Downtown figures. Although *Portraits* doesn't offer the frisson of the earlier work's side-by-side juxtapositions (with their occasional fortuitous resonances), it does offer, in succession, an especially broad range of theatrical performers.

Among them are such New York stage regulars as Reed Birney, Jane Houdyshell, Neal Huff, Marin Ireland, David Patrick Kelly, Alison Pill and Scott Shepherd. Also included are some actors with a particularly high profile and name recognition: Holly Hunter, Patti LuPone, William H. Macy, Roger Rees, Alan Rickman, Liev Schreiber and Lili Taylor. In a category of her own is the ever-fascinating veteran Ruth Maleczek. Also represented are the ensembles Radiohole and SITI Company, as well as artists who perform in Japanese and Chinese classical theater traditions.

According to Michalek's website, "Each scene-sequence of drama will be crafted to provide a physical metaphor for an emotional condition. This will be created through various means—determinants (the problem, plot, theme or context of the characters and their circumstances), consequences (deliberate manifestations of feeling as gestures and expressions), moods (induced in the character and filling the scene), and involuntary emotions (internal emotional states). Within the length of the playback, the specific and greatly varying skills and techniques brought forth by each performer will be seen in a new way."

As Lincoln Center Festival's artistic director, Nigel Redden co-commissioned *Slow Dancing*—which has gone on to be seen in over a dozen cities worldwide—and nurtured this project which, like its predecessor was conceived with the Lincoln Center Plaza in mind. "The technique for this one is similar, but conceptually it's a whole different animal," he says of *Portraits*.

In the four years since *Slow Dancing* wowed crowds, much has changed at Lincoln Center. The various pieces of the major campus renovation have been completed, and the new look is sleeker and features more high-tech amenities. The theater that serves as Michalek's "canvas" (formerly known as the New York State Theater) has undergone its own interior renovation and acquired its new name. Notes Redden, "One thing that's true about his work in both cases is that it's gorgeous to look at. It draws you in immediately. To some extent, it is very much the esthetic of the campus at the moment the plaza has become a wonderfully pristine place, which it wasn't in 2007. I think the new work will look all the better in the renovated space.

"I feel that David's work is a wonderful bridge between the visual and performing arts. One of the things I feel is particularly brilliant about it is its site-specificity. Obviously *Slow Dancing* and this new work *could* have been done somewhere else, but there is something very right about doing it at Lincoln Center, especially in conjunction with the Festival, because in both projects, there's a wide range of genres that are being explored. That's very much in keeping with what we are about as a festival."

