New York Theatre Ballet @ The Egg, 5/6/11

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By Tresca Weinstein
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ALBANY – The 13 dancers of the New York Theatre Ballet have got moves, but, more important, they have heart, spirit and soul. In a performance at the Egg Friday night, this little treasure of a company imbued a wonderfully varied program with captivating drama.

Titled "A Celebration of Legends & Visionaries," the evening included work by John Butler, Merce Cunningham, Frederick Ashton and Antony Tudor, who was teacher and mentor to the company's founder and artistic director, Diana Byer. The young, versatile dancers took on each work with ease, elegance and not a hint of the stiff, mannered formality that can make ballet so deadly. Pianists Mariko Miyazaki and Michael Scales accompanied several of the pieces live on stage, lending an aura of intimacy to the performance.

Tudor's 1938 "Soiree Musicale," with its folk-dance flavor, is a perfect fit for the company's naturalistic style. Set to music by Gioachino Rossini, it is arranged as a collection of vignettes, including a Spanish-accented trio and pas de deux by one shyly infatuated couple and one spritely pair. In a similar vein, Ashton's charming "Capriol Suite," from 1930, is inspired by classic Renaissance dances and comprises playful duets, a quartet of clowning acrobats and a stately processional, all performed with gentle self-parody.

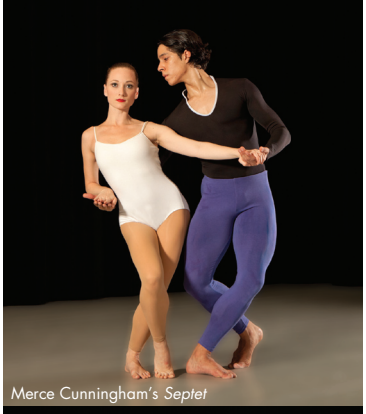
In a very different vein, the company danced Cunningham's "Septet," from 1953, with total confidence. The work is notable in that it is the last one Cunningham choreographed to melodic accompaniment (Erik Satie's "Trois Morceaux en Forme de Poire") before turning to the dissonant sound scores (many by John Cage) with which his work is most closely identified. It's not just the melody, however, that lends feeling to the piece, but also the interactions between the dancers, their facial expressions, touches of humor and a series of sculptural tableaux with the dancers always linked.

In terms of emotional content, however, "Septet" pales beside Butler's 1976 version of "Othello" and Tudor's "Jardin aux Lilas (Lilac Garden)," first performed in 1936. Butler's fiery interpretation, with music by Antonin Dvorak, portrays a relationship between Othello (Steven Melendez) and Iago (Joshua Andino-Nieto) that is every bit as passionate, in its own way, as that of Othello and Desdemona (Rie Ogura). The two men's powerful pas de deux are marked by intense physicality and full-body contact.

The uppermost note in "Jardin" is of longing, as Caroline (Elena Zahlmann) and her fiancé (Terence Duncan) separately engage in furtive tete-á-tetes with their lovers (Kyle Coffman and Ogura) in the last hours before their marriage of convenience. Time and again they draw close and then must pull away, their stolen moments as sweet and fleeting as the scent of lilacs.

Tresca Weinstein is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.

Antony Tudor's *Soiree Musicale*


Merce Cunningham's *Septet*

John Butler's *Othello*

Antony Tudor's *Jardin aux Lilas*

Photos: Richard Termine