

Gala 25th

Rebecca Kelly Ballet's anniversary performance is an overview that shows she's preserving the classical style, adding contemporary themes and modern flourishes. A film was shown with short clips of dances over the years, all by Kelly. An environmental series was most intriguing as the choreographer divides her time between NYC and the Adirondack mountains. One dance is called "Tear of the Clouds." I could see this small ensemble company of dancers--from Hawaii, Minsk, The Moiseyev, The Joffrey, and elsewhere--making a mark with this timely subject.

It was heartening to see the gender dynamic in the dances Kelly presented at John Jay Theater March 9, opening night of her season here. Women were not dragged across the floor, and I left the performance without the feeling I had been to a bad party. I wondered how twenty-five years went by and I never saw the work of Rebecca Kelly. Stephen Mills Ballet Austin comes to mind because both choreographers have a component of energetic modern inspired movement. Kelly's is the more balletic; Mills is branded with idiosyncratic movement. For Kelly a similar singularity would best introduce her to a public hungry for substance in contemporary ballet.

"Air" is lovely to an original score by Martha Gallagher with an interesting combination of amplified breathing and Celtic harp. The piece's sensual lightness is its subject, with many turns to riffs in the music. Arms are strong and curvaceous and hands defined but sometimes with fingers spread or moving paddle-like--not the typical ballet hands. Their form is pleasing but the hands stop short of telling us something. Elysia Dawn looks very classical and in good form--light as air. Emily Vonne SoRelle looks less centered, less sure, yet possesses a certain naturalness I liked. Alexander Forsythe completes the trio ably partnering first one, then the other ballerina. Over the course of the evening he reveals character.

SoRelle and some of the others' chin juts forward and slightly down, modernesque or Tayloresque. It hampers the expressive line because we're not face-to-face and cannot easily connect. It's as if they are intent

on their efforts but not especially speaking to us. There are staccato turns that didn't quite catch the rhythm of the music and could have been more defined so as not to appear poor sisters of the pirouette. They happen upstage as back up.

"Silver Circles" is celebratory to a bold score by Adrian Carr. The music is theatrical and dramatic--so is the dance. Despite a heavy-handed piano, the spirit of self-celebration is sustained with the dance's originality, cohesiveness, and engaging movement. Here we meet Theresa Wendler, who tirelessly dances with a naturalness and playfulness that recalls the great Russian ballerina Maya Plisetskaya. One of Wendler's teachers was Irina Koplakova. She spins around Dance Theater of Harlem guest Duncan Cooper in a white flared tutu-tard rimmed with reflective silver that catches the light. (Lighting is by Tony Marques and the costume by Anna Alisa Belous). The star-crossed lovers are surrounded by six ghoulish contortionists in black tattered bicycle shorts and tops; their faces can be downright scary. This could be a disaster but instead the group credibly portrays the ugly trolls. The pair huddle in the center for warmth, protected by their love. Finally they must share it and pas de deux with the outsiders. Is it my imagination, or does the group of unfortunates look calmed now, pacified? This 25th Anniversary premiere conveys a crucial message of compassion for the Other.

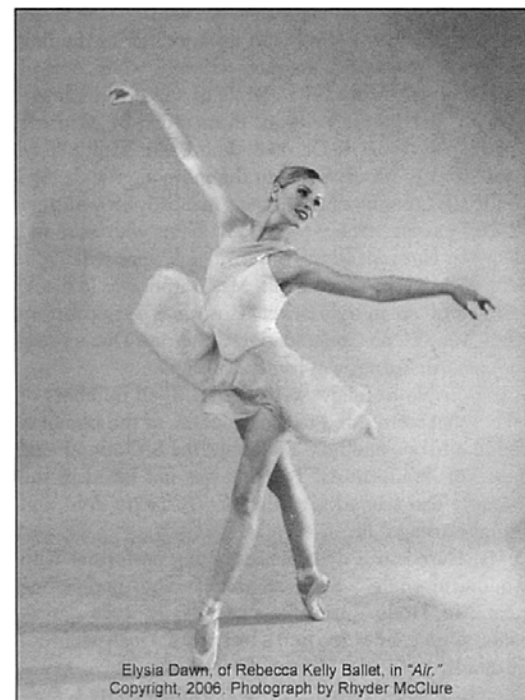
I bristled a bit at the 2002 "The Travelers;" then I noted it was made just after 9/11. I cannot help seeing even the most unrelated 2002 creation in light of that horrible event; given this leeway--Kelly made a jazzy dance to a mix of Propellerheads and Rob d. The backdrop is a stylized urban scene. Ten dancers include ABT's Jared Matthews whose considerable charisma glitters in this fashionable (of a time) dance. They rearrange chairs interestingly while pumping their torsos in unison as if on a bus. The movement's angular, sometimes mechanistic. It's energetic and fun--and sexy hot--possibly its making was cathartic. Kelly choreographs for TV and fashion. Though entertaining, "The Travelers" provided neither

fresh perspective nor rich experience on the concert stage. That comes after intermission--with the very satisfying 2004 "Jose's Dream," originally commissioned by The Orchestra of St. Lukes, to Rodion Shchedrin's "Carmen Suite."

Alexander Forsythe as Don Jose excellently shifts disturbed on his prison bed. Wendler again dances gorgeously with a Spanish flair as the cruel Carmen. Plisetskaya (married to Shchedrin) danced "Carmen Suite" in 1967. Escamillo is almost comic in Andrei Kisselev's excellent portrayal. He swings the toreadors red cape around him pompously, and otherwise flaunts his machismo with puffed chest and arrowlike legs down to his pointed toes. Both Kisselev and Wendler show admirable unconcern. The young Jose is Sasha Anatska, slightly leaden but sweet.

In this capsule version the incarcerated Jose dreams of the early events that led to his sad fate. Anything can happen in a dream and for a brief moment his young alter ego Anatska unites with childhood sweetheart Micaela, danced with quiet earnest by SoRelle. Wenders and Anatska duet raising their arms doubled in unison to a drum beat. Wendler swishes her shortish skirt and alluringly turns both knees to one side *en pointe*. Her death breaks our hearts nearly as much as it does Jose's. Kelly's endings are satisfying and sophisticated, as in this one where Jose is alone with his angst and our hearts.

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Elysia Dawn, of Rebecca Kelly Ballet, in "Air."
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