

# Ballet Manchester celebrates ten

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MANCHESTER -- Ballet Manchester's tenth season opened July 13 with "An Evening of Dances" presented by members of Dance Theater of Harlem who have formed their own company, Collage. The program's mix of classical, modern, and avant garde pieces reflected the mix of dance that Ballet Manchester has brought to Vermont for the past decade.

The evening opened with "Bach in TG Major," a neoclassical work choreographed by Tiffany Glenn, featuring soloists Andrea Long and Fidel Garcia. From the familiar music, with its pulse of continuo, to hints of the waltz from the two soloists, everything about the piece expressed the joy of the dance and set the celebratory mood for the evening.

"Walking and Falling" reflected company director Kevin Thomas, taste for combining words, music, and dance. Richard Garland's choreography, set to a mix of electronic music and percussion by Qasim Nagri and Michael Floyd and words from Laurie Anderson, explored the delicate, ephemeral nature of balance and Tai Jimenez, performance was masterful. Equally impressive were Allyson Ashley and Iyun Harrison in the "Doina pas de deux," where the slow, controlled movements of the dance are further emphasized by the constraint of shroud-like costumes.

Following an intermission, a trio of selections explored the nature of love and longing. In "Adagietto #5," choreographer Royston Maldoom uses Mahler, the composer of eternal yearning, to explore the tensions of a love triangle. As performed by Tai Jimenez, Mark Burns, and

Preston Dugger, this piece was emotionally powerful. The mood switched completely in "Splendor Now," another piece choreographed by Glenn. This exuberant exploration of a young man's first love, set to music by Kreisler, was performed by Xzavier Cave. A fine dancer, his relative youth showed in the way he did not fully inhabit the character he was portraying. By contrast, the well-matched Andrea Long and Fidel Garcia were utterly believable in "Unequilibrium," a lover's quarrel and reconciliation choreographed by Davis Robertson to the music of Bela Bartok.

After a second intermission the program closed with two pieces reflecting the same mix of traditional and modern dance with which it opened. Jamie Kotbra and Xzavier Cave performed the classic "Le Corsaire pas de deux." Here Cave was very much at home. Both he and Kotbra took full advantage of the opportunity to showcase their balletic mastery, leaving the audience delighted and applauding.

The evening closed with the world premiere of "Vicissitudes," choreographed by Glenn, with music and words by Manchester's own Donald Knaack. Knaack and students from Burr and Burton performed on recycled materials. "Vicissitudes" was conceived by Knaack as a series of observations about the climate in this country since Sept. 11. The workshop creation began with self-interest, moved into fear and on to a desire to control others, summarized as "You can't wear red," before concluding with a call for cool and calm that ended the work on a quiet note. The work, commissioned by Ballet Manchester to mark its anniversary, had been revised since its creation during a

spring residency at Burr and Burton.

However, what worked well as a philosophical statement was less effective as a grand finale, so the piece opened with cool and calm, before moving into the more energetic sections, concluding with "You can't wear red." This final movement clearly inspired the costuming (the dancers in all black except for soloists Ebony Haswell in a red top and Naimah Willoughby in red shorts), which brilliantly illustrated the color's symbolic force. By opening with a call for what we need and ending with a depiction of what we've got, the work moved from being a call to action to being a description of how we live now. In addition, for a work that clearly has something to say, a program note or at least a listing of the individual movements would have been helpful. Miking that would have made the words audible over the percussion would also have been highly desirable.

That said, the performance was impressive and effective. Haswell, the soloist in "Control," showed exactly that. Willoughby brought energy and barely contained aggression to "Self." The men of the company brought a power to the performance that was missing in its all-women workshop incarnation. The piece ended with Knaack and the musicians jamming on percussion while the dancers and audience clapped, ending the evening in the same spirit of celebration with which it opened.

The second concert of Ballet Manchester's anniversary season will be presented by members of the New York City Ballet on July 27 at 7:30 p.m. at the Southern Vermont Arts Center in Manchester. For information or tickets, please call 802-362-0759.