

Enrico Labayen & The LAB., Projekt Group-USA:

Full of beauty and contrast- Pure dance

San Francisco- "Mouth to Mouth," the dance concert by the LAB., Projekt Group-USA opened at Theater Artaud last night, was bold, open-hearted and absolute in its vision of shared human experience and of the soul seeking its true nature. It was an adventure full of beauty and contrast.

Enrico Labayen, choreographer and artistic director, controls his productions completely, creating choreography, costumes, lighting and staging. Traveling back and forth on the diagonal, he shows his enormous range and view of the world. Here he draws freely upon Sufi mysticism, Asian rituals, Indian forms, classical ballet and modern dance.

This is pure dance, dependent on music and harmonious structure, grounded in tradition and precisely articulated dance value's intent on universal truth. His choreography is remarkable for its powerful geometry and drive toward structural clarity, and for its brilliant use of and choice of music.

The veiled and distilled "Seekers" opened the concert to the piano music of Gurdjieff. A stylized, hypnotic exploration of the inner spiritual quest and of dynamic diagonals and circles, it was fascinating for its contrasts of stillness and movement, height and depth, and for all its variations on repetition, shifting accents and changing lines. It descends in deepening inner ecstasy to final transcendent resolution. The costumes were gorgeous.

In contrast, "Sonata" to the beautiful music of Faure, was dark, private and lonely dance of longing, danced with passion and abandon by Scott Meyers.

To parody the classical romantic dance was "Quatro," staged with layers of transparencies and associations. It opens in silence using only sounds of sighs and moans, human sounds in abstract sound pattern, a central metaphor. In a witty, sardonic and playful way "Quatro" comments on love, love's failures and the answer to existence.

Then there was "Damas," a ritual for women and wonderful for its purity and restraint.

Suzanne Saltmarsh danced with intensity and feeling the dance theater piece, "A Time to Sleep" to the haunting beauty of "Four Last Songs" by Richard Strauss. It was a moving evocation of character, time and place.

There was some fine dancing by all. Notable, especially, were the bold attack, fine phrasing and classical line of Fabrice Lemire and the exalted and effortless dancing of Laura Bernasconi, a real diva with great dramatic and musical gifts. She takes a line and runs off with it.

The unrelenting, feel-good "Puirt a Beul" ended the evening on an allegro to ovations from the audience. Even the programming was a work of art.

Movement does not lie. Dance is a spiritual endeavor. And at this time when one sees so much false pride, so much that is arid, contrived, tricky and essentially trivial, this young and energetic dance company has not lost the joy of it.

Marilyn Lenzen
Dance Critic
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