



Rewriting Balanchine and Genesis

BY DEBORAH JOWITT

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VOICE APRIL 8, 1986

Braham or Meg Eginton (newly powerful) or Frey Faust or Jeremy Nelson. Petronio, like Trisha Brown, with whom he danced for seven years, doesn't show you dancing plainly; the splendid performers in his dances are always rearranging the relationship of head to neck, arm to shoulder, and chest to hips, as well as foot to floor.

However, in *The Sixth Heaven* and the new *Walk-In*, I do notice pauses and moments of composure. My eye can pick out patterns in *Sixth Heaven*, which is no longer cut in two by a curtain of blue strips as it was originally. Dancers secede from leaping, twisting phrases to wriggle into something new, then casually join another step as it passes by. This gives the dancing the pleasing illusion of an excursion train figure-eighting around: hop on and ride for a while; jump off to collect a good-looking rock; race to re-

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board just as someone else is slipping off. Handsome.

The structuring of *Walk-In* is similar, and in it too, all six dancers are rarely on stage at the same time; there are definite duets, trios, and so on. However, the tone of *Walk-In* is different. Harsh. Scary. This is in part determined by David Linton's score, *Dias de Fuego y Muerte*. It is indeed music of fire and death: thudding percussion that hits you in the pit of the stomach, high ear-piercing electric shrieks. I admire it, but can't really hear it for the pain. (I wonder whether Linton means his music to be played at such assaultive volumes, or whether he's damaged his own ears to the extent that what's almost intolerable to me is moderate to him.) Justin Terzi's decor also alludes to disasters: on the black-and-white silk-screened side curtains are images of rescue, of Marcos, of a naked statuary woman howling.

But it's not just the music and decor

Genesis

BY DEBORAH JOWITT

Martha Connerton and the men in Milton Myers's *Caprice*

JOYCE TRISLER DANCECOMPANY. At the Joyce Theater (March 18 to 23). Premieres of Milton Myers's *Caprice* and *What If...*, also Trisler's *Sacre du Printemps*.

STEPHEN PETRONIO AND DANCERS. At Dance Theater Workshop (March 13 to 23). Premiere of *Walk-In*.

AMERICAN BALLROOM THEATER. At Brooklyn Academy of Music (March 18 to 30). *Sheer Romance*.

I have the impression that Milton Myers, the artistic director of the Joyce Trisler Danscompany, gets the same kind of charge that Trisler used to from making dances to music already firmly associated with another choreographer. It's a pretty nervy thing to do. Who can hear violins sing out the opening strains of Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for String Orchestra* in C Major, Op. 48, and not imagine Balanchine's flock of women gazing left, one arm raised?

When the Joyce's curtain rises on Myers's *Caprice*, we see instead five men in evening attire facing five women in short, dressy white gowns. On that summoning opening music—lush yet severe—they make grave formal gestures of greeting, take slow strides forward and backward, choose partners. Once I got used to the idea of a lighthearted ball, I found much to admire and enjoy about Myers's work.

He suggests social interplay without spelling it out. In the ensemble's waltzing there's a vivid interplay between swooping unison passages, asymmetrical partner changes, regroupings, and contrapuntal agitation. Myers hears well: he pulls the dancing in, quiets it, then unlooses it in broader, freer patterns—all quite in sympathy with Tchaikovsky's phrases.

The "Waltz" is used for a trio for Cristina Drellos, Jay Kerns, and Robert Mason; it's playful, but shows a hint of strain when one man loses his place in the looping interchanges and must stand aside. "Elegy" is a ballroom duet that turns ecstatic. Here there are times in which the extravagant ways that Kevin Campbell lifts Jennifer Blose draw atten-

tion away from the tide of dancing and emotion, but the dancers imbue it all with tenderness and restraint. Myers, unlike Balanchine, sticks to Tchaikovsky's order, so the "Elegy" is followed by the "Russian Dance"—a romp for Martha Connerton and the men (José Costas and Carl House, in addition to those mentioned). Connerton's fine at playing the saucy hoyden, who'd rather be spun from man to man than be alone with any one of them.

Myers has occasional musical and stylistic lapses. Tchaikovsky quiets down before he does, and for a short time, the choreography seems to babble. There's an odd moment in the first section: the women cluster around one of them and bow as if to a princess. Yet in the last dance, there's a hint of modern jazziness in the men's hip-first strides. It goes without saying that Myers can't compete with Balanchine. Still, it's a nice dance—friendly, easy on the eyes, with a beguiling, low-luster dazzle. And the dancers perform it excellently.

I'm not so keen on Myers's way with drama. *What if...* means what if God had the hots for Eve and invited her back into the garden, and Adam saw them together and killed Eve, even though she was resisting God's advances? Where would we be? (Maybe not watching this ballet.) The first thing we see is Mel Tomlinson being beautifully wroth—his long legs slicing the air, his hands thrashing, his bearing and face severe. The solo banks on our knowledge of Genesis, but in terms of the dance, it's just an inexplicable bit of upset virtuosity.

The trio (music by Colin McPhee, Gustav Mahler, and Toru Takemitsu, believe it or not) is long and drenched with emotion. Sometimes the drastic lifts and falls are breathtakingly vivid, seeming to embody feeling instead of depicting it; at other times they look like stunts that the dancers have to make meaningful through acting.

If you accept *What If...* as Myers's

way of showing us three dancers that he likes, the work comes off considerably better. Jay Kerns—short, white, slightly raw—looks touchingly young and impulsive beside Tomlinson, tall and black, with immaculate technique and saturnine elegance. Eve (Elena Comendador) is so tiny that the men can do all manner of amazing things with her, but she has immense power and expressiveness.

Danscompany's Joyce season also featured a revival of Trisler's *Rite of Spring*. When I first saw the work in 1974, I thought Trisler had too often sacrificed communality for showoff virtuosity. Either things that I once thought vulgar have been toned down (possibly when it was first transferred to Danscompany from the semistudent group it was made for), or I've become more tolerant of flash. Anyway, it seems a strong piece of work—a skillful intercutting of strenuous dance phrases performed in a blaze of energy. Although there's considerable public copulation, the only violence is in the dancing itself. Jennifer Blose isn't sacrificed; she collapses as if she's just given more than her all in a killer class.

Stephen Petronio's standing in a puddle of light at DTW; he's busy collapsing. The perkiness of Lenny Pickett's *Dance Music for Borneo Horns #5* acquires a sinister undertone when accompanying a man who can't stay erect for long. Not that Petronio falls: his arms shudder down, his head drops, his knees bend. He's not really limp; either his joints aren't holding firm, or he's deliberately rearranging downward the composition of his suit-and-tied self. A postmodern Petrouchka without even a girl doll to crave.

Petronio's a professional collapser, but usually the collapsing is a part of continuous silky process that keeps him rippling and tumbling across the floor, occasionally making him snag agreeably onto someone else who's looping in the other direction—Kristen Borg or Susan

what's almost intolerable to me is moderate to him.) Justin Terzi's decor also alludes to disasters: on the black-and-white silk-screened side curtains are images of rescue, of Marcos, of a naked statuary woman howling.

But it's not just the music and decor that are foreboding. From the first straining, upward-focused, in-place solo by Susan Braham, you feel something dangerous in the dancing. These people seem tossed and flung about—either by outside forces or by something that's taken over their limbs. Their leaps are like explosions, their falls like plunges, their contacts with each other aborted. But this is not a piece in which dancers run about staring offstage and acting terrified; the power is in the rich and varied dancing, in Petronio's ability to make both the phrases and the larger progression lurch and stall, explode, and shrivel. If it's an exorcism or a spell against disaster or a political statement, I doubt that it'll do any good; but it's an impressive and provocative piece of art.

We're used to seeing our plain-Jane contemporary dances turn spectacular when they hit the BAM stage, all decked out in their Next Wave finery. It was no surprise to see American Ballroom Theater similarly fancied up. And in this case, the show, *Sheer Romance*, looked and sounded the way one always thought—hoped—it *could* look.

Instead of taped music, the BAM audience gets a fine live orchestra, conducted by Phillip Della Pena. Perhaps taking a cue from *Tango Argentino*, designer Eduardo Sicangco has made the orchestra part of the decor, built cocktail tables and stools discreetly into the curve of the bandstand and created a circular opening above that can change color or fill with tasteful silhouetted projections. The dance floor is round. Because of the live orchestra, the unifying power of Dick Hyman's orchestrations, and Tom Skelton's handsome and mobile lighting, dance numbers can slide into each other, thereby reducing the need for silence and the bits of mildly corny byplay that once served as transitions.

Sheer Romance is fundamentally the same show it was at DTW in 1985. It still moves from suave Rainbow Room fox trots to pseudo-Spanish capework, gyp-

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