

# A Bazaar of Impressions

BY DEBORAH JOWITT

**BOSTON BALLET.** At Performing Arts Center, SUNY-Purchase (July 11 to 13). Balanchine's *Square Dance*, Tudor's *Jardin aux Lilas*, Mark Morris's *Mort Subite*.

**NEW VOICES IN DANCE.** At Performing Arts Center, SUNY-Purchase (July 13). Dana Reitz's *Solo in Silence*, Kei Takei's *Light, Part 23: Pilgrimage Field*.

**PARIS OPERA BALLET.** At Metropolitan Opera House (July 9 to 19). Nureyev's *Washington Square*.

## SUNDAY, JULY 13, SUNY-PURCHASE—

This feels almost more like an eccentric and slightly pressured crafts fair than an afternoon of dances. I think I like it. Say you chose to spend the bulk of your time at PepsiCo Summerfare with the Boston Ballet (the matinee begins at 3 in Theater A), you could still buy a ticket for "New Voices in Dance," see Dana Reitz in Theater C at 2, and maybe spend your intermissions popping back to Theater C to catch Elizabeth Streb or Ishmael Houston-Jones or Susan Rethorst or Channel Z or Watchface. Whichever ticket(s) you buy, you can try to catch one, or all three of the parts of Kei Takei's epic *Light* that are being performed in the drizzle and muddy grass outside the Neuberger Museum. Or maybe you'd like to watch the several nonstop video showings in the lobby. Or eat.

I'm officially here to see the Boston Ballet, so I decided to play it conservatively. First Reitz. She's taken fragments from several previous works and put them together as *Solo in Silence*. Theater C isn't huge, but she looks very solitary and mysterious in the dimly lit stage space. She seems to be exploring a space that constantly changes its contours and dimensions. Perhaps a golden glow fades to blackness on her gently weaving figure; a second later, she'll gradually materialize elsewhere on the stage—so gradually that at first you can barely see her pale arms flashing and her gray skirt whipping around her (the beautiful lighting was adapted by John McLain from Bob Shannon's design). So subtly do her softly treading feet and her complicated lashing, stroking gestures modulate scale, speed, intensity, and focus that you can believe that she's tuning herself in to the theater and all of us, trying to find our wave length. Or maybe it's the other way around: there is something of the sorceress about her. When she dances in a flashing sequined cap, you can believe her brain is gleaming. She seems to listen intently the instant a baby in the audience gurgles, neither before nor after. Those who aren't hypnotized are baffled. The blackouts and exits keep them on edge thinking the dance is going to end. That it doesn't strikes them as preposterous. A woman dancing alone to no music for 45 minutes? I'm refreshed.

The Boston Ballet corps breezes neatly, spiritedly through the cool, fresh patterns of George Balanchine's *Square Dance*. For all its comradely sauntering, its balance-and-swing-and-promenade-home formations, its egalitarian partnering, the ballet is a little killer. Whipping out her entrechats and gargouillades and other fierce jumps, the French Marie-Christine Mouis shows the bold legs, forthright energy, and clean, bright manner that Balanchine presented to the world as "American." Her partner, Devon Carney, is sensitive, although rather too careful, in the remarkable, almost drastic solo that Balanchine made for Bart Cook.

The dancers in Antony Tudor's *Lilac Garden* are careful too. It's not a bad way to be. That is, Tudor's exquisite dramatic sensibility comes through, and we can be moved by the plight of these lovers who're about to be attached forever to the wrong partner and are powerless to renege. Just doing the steps as Tudor conceived them sets up an overwhelming atmosphere of haste and aborted expres-

sion. As the four principals and the other guests at this stiff party rush expectantly into the garden, exchange a few hurried gestures or dance steps, and rush away, you begin to feel that everyone's heart is beating impossibly fast—the more so when their bodies are still. Leslie Jonas, William Pizzuto, and Elaine Bauer are good, but could be—perhaps *will* be—much better. Arthur Leeth seems only intermittently inside the role of Caroline's despairing former lover.

Mark Morris's *Mort Subite* is quite a ballet, and it's like nothing in the bright, variegated repertory of his own small company. There's always been something of the prodigy about Morris, so it's not hard to understand how he could create such an accomplished and arresting bal-

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let on this scale. He didn't choose easy music either. Poulenc's *Concerto in G Minor for Organ, Strings, and Timpani* is moody and erratic on a noble plane; even its two "giocoso" sections have a wildness that darkens their tone. Morris begins with all 16 dancers (looks like more) in a rough procession that curves from upstage left to downstage right. They begin a sequence of very close canon, each dancer or group of dancers igniting those directly behind. But Morris hasn't chosen the kind of movement that makes your eye ripple easily down the line; the steps swing now one way, now the other, and you see a turbulence—a wrenching almost—that is nonetheless ordered. It's as if the dance is trying to pull itself apart.

The last four dancers in that line—all men—begin a dance that slides subtly in and out of unison. As *Mort Subite* rolls along without a pause, this quartet is set against the other 12 dancers, except that it's constantly being repopulated. One at a time, people withdraw from it, backing away, one hand clutched to face. Very gradually all the men are replaced by women, then the process reverses. The 12 dancers and the four keep threading in and out with their brushing mazurka steps, other bold, quick phrases, or slow swinging ones that create an image of tolling bells. The quartet/ensemble metaphor is a potent one: dancers slip away, the dance goes on. A subtext comments touchingly on ballet's traditional gender distinctions.

I come back from a trip to the restroom to finish watching Twyla Tharp's career unfold on a video monitor and find someone rewinding it so that people emerging from Theater C can start at the beginning. Outside, Kei Takei's dancers, in white clothes with bright painting on them, are just beginning to advance along a strip of damp grass. Some freeze, while others stamp out a bold, springy march, their precisely flailing gestures aimed toward the ground. This is the new first part of *Light, Part 23: Pilgrimage*. Vigorous, intense, the dancers journey down the strip of lawn. Each rushes to a young maple: now I know why there are 16 dancers—a tree for each. The trees are now erotic objects, now dangerous, now pacifying. The exhausted, mud-caked dancers finally abandon them and slowly disappear down the brick steps of the plaza.

For some people, I imagine it's been a hard-to-pin-down day. At the chic snack stand, things are sold by the pound: eight ounces of broccoli and eight ounces of goose-liver paté cost the same.

Standing aghast in the lobby of the Met, we tried to find similes for Rudolf Nureyev's *Washington Square*. As

Jamesian as... mud wrestling? As Jamesian as the Folies Bergère? As Erica Jong? Everything fell flat.

The work itself, spiritedly and devotedly performed by members of the Paris Opera Ballet, doesn't fall flat; it's just preposterous.

The idea of making a ballet out of Hen-

odd as the setting. As characterized by Nureyev and danced (at the performance I saw) by Clotilde Vayer, Cathy's silly matchmaking aunt is a lusty procuress, who has a clever, if inappropriate, duet with Morris. When, at Wednesday's matinee, her skirt accidentally fell off and she was forced to make a dash for the wings in her skivvies, Charles Jude—a fine, bold, sly Morris—not surprisingly flung the skirt after her with "What a woman!" gusto. Nureyev may have had some hot problems in mind. When, at the end of the ballet, the aunt is trying to reunite Morris and Cathy (now deep in spinsterhood, but wearing the same little spaghetti-strap frock), she inserts herself between them to make a happy three-



Members of the Boston Ballet in Mark Morris's *Mort Subite*

ry James's claustrophobic novel is an interesting one, and using music by Charles Ives to suggest the brawling life of 19th century New York shows daring and imagination. But in the first place, Nureyev, although wanting a Grahamian flexibility in time and space, saddled himself with a cumbersome realistic set (a very sumptuous one by Antoni Taule); it gave him two options: a street corner on Washington Square and the house in which James's wealthy, mourning widower has immured himself with his foolish sister and his plain, shy daughter. ("Outside" changes to "inside" via the rumbling maneuvers of stagehands.) The setting doesn't lend itself to transformations: when city people crowd around the daughter's suitor, Morris, you don't see "memories crowding in," you fear a mugging. It doesn't always facilitate realistic behavior either. The proper young heroine, Cathy, appears to pick up handsome fortune-hunting Morris (but does he really love her?) in the street, where he's dancing with some spry folk. The family is supposed to be praying in a cemetery (mama's ghost shows up), but what we actually see is a bunch of dancers who've entered and lain down in the middle of West 4th Street.

Psychology and choreography are as

some. After Morris leaves, Cathy just about strangles her. (As Jamesian as *Dallas*?)

There's another puzzling duet for Morris and "Le Père" (Nureyev himself). We know the father disapproves of the guy, but they seem to be getting on like a house afire—vying with each other in the fussy, nimble footwork typical of Nureyev's choreography for himself. Pattycake does turn to fisticuffs, but why pattycake in the first place?

The most eloquent choreography appears in a duet for Morris and Cathy (beautifully acted and danced by Florence Clerc) to *The Unanswered Question*. Many of Nureyev's ensemble passages have a floorward tendency: a few steps, and everyone's ready to lie down; but the Fourth of July parades—a crisscrossing of marching bands, a corps of Texan militiamen, marketwomen, liveried black servants, a dozen blond Statues of Liberty, and I don't know what, is lively, if startling. As Jamesian as... the Paris Opera?

The dancers are marvelous, and it was exciting to see them dance George Balanchine's 1947 *Palais de Crystal*, which we know as *Symphony in C*. I'll save it for later, when I've recovered from "What Happened to Henry?" ■

## Foreign Affairs

BY BURT SUPREE

**LIBERTY DANCES.** At Battery Park Esplanade (July 11 to 14). Works by Pat Graney, Odile Duboc, Liz Lerman, Bebe Miller, Jean-Michel Agius, Josette Baiz.

This year, choreographer Elise Bernhardt of the Brooklyn-based Dancing in the Streets conceived a big-time and timely project, the French/American Dance Exchange. Supported by governments on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as private and corporate donors, the exchange resulted in a fair trade—performances in New York by three American choreographers and three French choreographers working with American com-

panies, and in Paris by three American choreographers—Susan Marshall, Mark Taylor, Yoshiko Chuma—working with Jacques Garnier's superb Groupe de Recherche Choréographique de l'Opéra de Paris (GRCOP) in the Metro, on the steps of the Opéra, at Beaubourg, and at other sites. What was so sensible about the project—besides its obvious connection to all the Statue of Liberty hoopla—was its recognition of the deep ties forged in the past 20-odd years between French and American dance.

For more than two decades, the active interest was pretty much one way: we

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