

Garfein scores with 'Mythologies'

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The premiere of Mark Morris' "Mythologies" at Northeastern University was widely discussed

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in the local and national press. But hardly anyone said anything much about the score by Herschel Garfein, and that doesn't seem fair. It isn't every day that a Boston composer produces a score for a evening-length work by a major choreographer. And the performance in late February by the new-music group Alea III was remarkable.

The second two sections of Garfein's three-part work struck me as particularly striking. "Strip-tease," with its sleazy-sounding electronic overlay, was at once the real bump-and-grind thing and a pitiless commentary on it. The tape collage that accompanied the third section, "Championship Wrestling," also was interesting, capturing the sonic ambience of big, public sporting events, and again providing a running commentary at the same time. The first section, "Soap Powders and Detergents," seemed less successful. The texts come from commercial jingles, but the musical idiom was tense and dense. We were in the world of Leonard Bernstein's "Trouble in Tahiti," and something more relaxed and jazzily parodistic in sound might have fit the text better. The joke, if it was a joke, of the disparity between sound and subject matter wore thin.

On the other hand, Garfein may have been quite serious in his intentions here. The most remarkable thing about Morris' choreography, it seemed to me, was the way it mingled genres ordinarily kept completely apart — it was both ritual and satire. And Morris couldn't have accomplished what he did if Garfein hadn't been there before him.

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