Sensibilities

"Exuberant Fanfare", "At the Seams", "Lissajous" and "Du Vent et des Vages"
Bowen McCauley Dance Company
Terrace Theater
The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
Washington, DC
May 18, 2019

by George Jackson

The entire program was titled “An Awakening”, and without doubt the evening’s choreographers, Lucy Bowen McCauley and Ilana Goldman, displayed the ferment and sensitivity of nascent feelings. The joyous opener, “Exuberant Fanfare” by Bowen McCauley, was very balletic. Bodies were turned-out and limbs were streamlined or smoothly folded, with steps and stances being linked together propulsively. The piece could have been even more danse d’école if its three women, or at least their leader, had worn toe shoes. The two men stood, partnered and soloed with filigree leg-and-footwork much as danseurs can in neoclassical ballet. The music, played live by violinist Leonid Sushansky and pianist Carlos Cesar Rodriguez, was Igor Stravinsky having fun recomposing scores from early 18th Century Italy. The shift of mood to the next piece was sharp.

The two women in Ilana Goldman’s “At the Seams” might have been proud Roman matriarchs joining together in order to grieve. Somewhat more emotional is one of the pair (guest artist Sona Kharatian), whereas the other (choreographer Goldman) is the more stoic. Goldman arched protectively over Kharatian as they worked their way across the shadows of the stage. Deep sorrow, though, knows no relief. An ancient piece of sculpture seemed to have risen from the earth.

Taking the measure of the 18th Century but going on to produce a piece of contemporary art hadn’t only happened in the opener as Stravinsky’s prerogative. Bowen McCauley also did it in “Lissajous”. We watched a documentary video about some of the rehearsals for this dance and then saw the dance itself. The title refers to certain curve patterns, drawn or danced. Bowen McCauley set the work for eight dancers, both women and men. Its sensibility is that of modern dance, despite the occurrence of some balletic steps and stances. Tensions throughout the bodies give the choreography its unclassical aspect. Even though there are pattern symmetries in this dance’s groupings, a feeling of asymmetry dominates. The electronic sound score (Jordan Alexander Key’s “To Say Pi” played live by him on a computer) also contributed to the work’s modern sensibility. Patterning, though, no matter how varied the detail, can seem reiterative.
The dance feeling of the closing piece, “Du Vent et des Vages”, was indeed that of wind and the waves. In addition to suggesting a heaving and churning sea, Bowen McCauley’s choreography also matched the bravura runs of Franz Liszt’s piano music, performed by Nikola Paskalov. Was the choreographer thinking of the “symphonic” dance works with their intricate architecture that the Ballet Russe troupes used to perform? She certainly made a smaller model (seven dancers) of that type of dance and did so skillfully. Perhaps a couple of the images stopped the viewer’s imagination by being too literal, but mostly the action flowed.

For a small troupe – Dustin Kimball, Aaron Bauer, Mackenzie Rawls, Alicia Curtis, Patrick Green, Eve Holmes Varner, Elenaluisa Alvarez, Justin Metcalf-Burton and Ashley Taylor are the nine regular dancers – achieving the variety of this repertory is remarkable.

Photo above: BMDC in "At the Seams." Photo: Jeff Malet.
Posted at 05:01 PM in George Jackson | Permalink