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DANCE REVIEW

New Dances at Juilliard

Veteran Choreographers, Young Dancers and a Program of Premieres



Nan Melville for The New York Times

Senior star turn: Dancers from the Juilliard Class of 2005 in "Mass" by Robert Battle, part of a program on which each choreographer got his own class to work with, or vice versa.

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

"New Dances at Juilliard," a program both innovative and traditional, presented four robust premieres created for the Juilliard School's dance division on Saturday night at the Juilliard Theater. Janis Brenner, Susan Marshall, Ronald K. Brown and Robert Battle were the choreographers. All are familiar in modern dance and direct their own companies, and it was unusual to see all four on the same program.

It was a cardinal belief of Martha Hill, the founding director of the dance division, that students must have the experience of working with professional choreographers. Lawrence Rhodes, the current director, has continued this tradition with a twist: Each visiting choreographer involved a different one of the four student classes in a creative process.

Ms. Brenner was assigned the freshmen, Class of 2008, and never talked down to them in her choreography for "HeartStrings for 18." It is a visually striking piece, evoking

Yet each work was distinct in its movement. The idiom here was in broad, fluid strokes, initially for four dancers. There was also a string quartet at stage right that played John Reed's arrangement of the English folk tune "Scarborough Fair" and songs by the Beatles and Led Zeppelin.

More dancers filled the stage, performing a variety of lifts and occasionally positioning themselves on the chairs. At one point, they formed a tautly held chain. In their brilliant red pants, the dancers were always part of a stunning spatial composition. But there were always images of human relationship. A troubled love duet was strongly danced by Collin Baja and Mary Beaudreau. The string quartet included JoAnna Farrer, Christina McGann, Youyoung Kim and Andrew Ford.

Ever the experimentalist, Ms. Marshall gave the Class of 2007 a workout in "Working Memory," set to three movements of Richard Einhorn's "Silence," played by the Juilliard musicians in the pit. The dancers improvised during rehearsals and Ms. Marshall credited them as collaborators.

Mr. Brown's "Dancing for Peace" looked more abstract than his work elsewhere. The urban African roots in some of his idiom were less obvious. Yet heightened gesture was still present as the dancers, in bright colors, each raised a finger from time to time in an appeal for peace. Terry Riley's "Echoes of Primordial Time" and "Mongolian Winds" were heard on a recording by the Kronos Quartet.

Mr. Brown knew how to adapt his style to the Class of 2006 and yet remain himself. He made room for soloists (Belinda McGuire, Bryna Pascoe and Abbey Roesner). All the gestures (hand to heart), slides and stamping were typically part of Mr. Brown's communal energy.

Mr. Battle, the youngest choreographer, has recently made a name for himself with original rapid-fire movement and unexpected imagery. His "Mass" was accompanied by John Mackey's percussion score, commissioned by Mary Rodgers Guettel. Mr. Battle cast Corey Scott-Gilbert as the leader of a silent choir. The Juilliard Percussion Ensemble, at the rear of the stage, provided the sound, growing in

a geometric abstraction in its painterly use of space. Like the program's other pieces, it is plotless with an emotional undercurrent.

The piece has the deceptive look of a purely formal exercise, although a soloist, Riley Watts, agile and resilient, was yanked around like a victim. There was also the conceit of two men reading books on music stands. The choreography, with its lunges, slides and speed, demanded perfect timing. The dancers provided it. David Briskin was the conductor.

intensity.

Mr. Battle took the senior class along the same path. The dancers scooted around, huddled and worked themselves up wonderfully into astounding vigor. The ritual ended with the leader throwing himself to the floor and a group flying out into the wings. Clifton Taylor created the nuanced lighting for the evening.

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