

This One's A Winner
Men in Dance, Program 2, Friday, October 19, 2012
Broadway Performance Hall, Seattle
by Dean Speer

When I wrote last week: While none of the pieces this biennium made me think, "Wow! That's great choreography," I had not yet seen Program 2 and in particular Bill Wade's "Doppelganger" made in 2001 for his Inlet Dance Theatre of Ohio.

The arc of the choreographic idea and intent was clear from start to finish, was beautifully executed with amazing control by Joshua Brown and Justin Stentz and which reminded me of some of the best of the ever-creative Pilobolus Dance Company. I liked how the sculptural shapes kept evolving and changing – just when you've thought you've seen it all, something new is invented.

I also thoroughly enjoyed the other new pieces – Olivier Wevers' "MORE," Paula Peters' "Alone In My Room," Transient of Life" by Geoffrey Johnson, and Joshua D. Romero's social commentary piece, "AlphaA."

Anytime you can have Andrew Bartee perform in your work, you're lucky. This talented youthful dancer from Everett has the kind of archy feet, long legs, and extensions that most dancers would sell their grandmothers to have. Add on his superb Pacific Northwest Ballet training and performing experience and we get one artist who is a terrific audience draw. Choreographer Olivier Wevers captured a piece of the essence of the narcissism of contemporary youth with his "MORE" made to a condensed version of Ravel's iconic "Bolero." Ravel's compositional tool is that he took one melody and repeated it multiple times but added layers of instrumental voices gradually on top. If any choreographer doesn't at least partly follow this pattern, they're in trouble. Fortunately, Wevers carefully crafted mini-scenes that arced and built, using his character's obsession with a simple T-shirt as its base.

Twisting, jumping backward, rolling and swinging on the floor, making shapes that only someone as flexible as Bartee could, the piece built nicely along, got bogged down a bit toward the end and concluded with Bartee yelling and tearing the front of the shirt. Many cheers from a pleased audience.

"AlphaA" refers directly to the head dog of the pack, each vying for hegemony, as was the case here with Romero's take with Sebastian Arango, Jovan Dansberry, Brian Domino, Phillip Lu shoving each other aside to thrust themselves into the center picture with a hip-hop like movement palette.

Solo dancer Fausto Rivera in Peter's opus recalled the angst of its Gershwin song "My Man's Gone Now." Excellent.

Strong walking patterns suggested a dramatic theme for Johnson's presentation of five young men with attitude – Eric E. Agular, Jesse Buckingham, Chris McCallister, Sean Tomerlin, and Markeith Wiley.

Christopher Montoya, as Doris Vidanya, appeared again as a "guest" from the Ballet Trockadero de Monte Carlo and was stronger this time around. I'd still like to see this excellent dancer in straight choreography sometime. Perhaps in the next Men in Dance Festival of 2014.

Some things are never explained to audiences and some are never meant to be explained. Deborah Wolf's "Crash of Days" and Wade Madsen's comedic "Männer Tanz" were supposed to have switched their respective bookend places from Program 1 but at the top of the show, we were told

they'd not do this and their original places as before were kept. I'm not sure it made a difference, although it got the director in me curious.

Men In Dance 2012 was the accomplishment of many and a shout out has to go to its dedicated producers: Kyle Cable, Steve Casteel, Brenda Howard, Richard Jessup, Brian Joe, Gary Reed, Gérard Théorêt, Deborah Wolf, and Raymond Houle.

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