

UCOH Is Open for Interpretation

Festival Ballet Providence closes its 37th season with their popular *Up Close On Hope* dance series and the best way to describe this program, which leans a bit more toward contemporary dance than past programs, is “open for interpretation.”

With classical ballet, even when presented in excerpts, which is generally the case for UCOH, audiences know the story, whereas with many contemporary pieces the story is not always clear, and in many cases, it is very personal for the choreographer.

Yet the lack of an identifiable theme does not detract from the program’s aesthetic appeal, which also features many of the company’s younger dancers sharing the stage with some of the more familiar faces; Jaime DeRocker and Eugenia Zinovieva continue to impress.

The performance opens with Joseph Morrissey’s “Mein Weg.” Five dancers, three females and two males dressed in black depict a somewhat frantic scene. Dancers walk quickly across the stage while others perform vogue-like movements framing their faces or bodies with their arms. The male dancers share partnering duties as the music builds and the pace quickens. Ilya Burov continues to show he is one of the company’s most versatile and reliable dancers.

Next is Sydney Skybetter’s “Near Abroad.” Originally created for a man and a woman, FBP chose to present it with two male dancers, adding to its intrigue. The piece seems an exploration of relationships where at times we can feel so near, but so distant. Alex Lantz and Ty Parmenter are gentle and tender, keeping constant contact with one another. Other times, there is a sense of desperation with clutching and clinging, the dancers tumbling to the floor. Yet they have an inherent trust in one another until the final moment when Parmenter leans backward, but Lantz is not there to catch him.

The mood lightens with Parmenter’s “Slip Flap.” Four female dancers wander about wearing long-sleeve thermal tops and men’s underwear. The choreography starts out very lively with the dancers copying each other. Then the music softens and the dancers’ movements are slower and more deliberate with each seeming to complete another’s phrase, a continuous chain of movements.

FBP artistic director Mihailo Djuric’s light and lyrical “For Susan” follows, a charming Romeo and Juliet type pas de deux. Ruth Whitney and Alan Alberto give the piece great depth and emotion. At one point, he gently lifts her and she reaches back to caress his neck. Whitney is light and airy; Alberto the perfect counterpoint with long, muscular lines. “Susan” flows nicely and finishes in a sweeping promenade with Whitney opening her arms and leaning back, giving herself completely to Alberto.

Just before intermission, company dancer Vilia Putrius premieres the deeply personal “All the Birds Become Silent to the Moon’s Complaints,” a tribute to a friend who took her own life. It begins with an endearing pas de deux with Putrius and Mindaugus Bauzys playfully interacting with a child. Later the child grows up and is surrounded by dancers dressed in black robes carrying heavy sacks, representing the weighty burdens we all carry. Yet sometimes these burdens can be overwhelming as the once happy child leaps into darkness.

Jaime Diaz’s “Embers” opens the second half. And, as the title suggests, this is a “hot” pas de deux featuring Brenna DiFrancesco and Parmenter. With him shirtless, it is a fluid and passionate piece. On

several occasions, Parmenter's legs buckle when DiFrancesco lightly touches his chest yet he sparks back to life. But alas his passion burns itself out and he collapses to the floor.

Next, 19-year-old company member Jorge Rullan presents "3:23." Set to a clanging piano, the piece seems to suggest a sense of losing control. Dancers leap and crash to the floor, the music swells and the desperation grows. Yet, DeRocker and Alberto meet and their movements become softer and more controlled with each seeming to have fulfilled the other's needs. They dance and find peace, but their encounter abruptly ends with a simple handshake.

Putrius and Bauzys return for "Romantic Pas de Deux," a breathless exercise in stamina and technique that both dancers make look near perfect and effortless. From the opening, with his completing multiple double tours en l'air and dropping to one knee just in time to support her, the audience is treated to a series of demi-solos. Putrius amazes hopping en pointe in a diagonal across the stage while executing a series of pirouettes. The audience claps loudly when Bauzys spins on one leg, calmly finishing in a triple pirouette. The piece ends with her balanced precariously on his shoulder.

Resident choreographer Viktor Plotnikov's "Urban Shadows" completes the program. With four dancers, two men and two women wearing all grey, this number features Plotnikov's trademark choreography where even the dancer's bodies become props as one leans, sits or climbs over another. One movement sets off another when one dancer gently touches another with a foot or a hand to initiate a response.

FBP's *Up Close On Hope* runs through April 25 in the company's Black Box Theatre. For tickets or more information, visit festivalballet.com.