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Dušan Týnek

Dušan Týnek Dance Theatre

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by Susan Reiter

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Clarity of vision and an overlay of luminous melancholy were evident in the two substantial world premieres offered by the Czech-born Dušan Týnek, who has been attracting considerable critical enthusiasm since he formed his company in 2003. This was my introduction to his choreography, and while the program was thoughtful and cleanly crafted, the movement invention remained somewhat earthbound, especially in

relation to the sensuously eloquent music to which he set his works. Occasional unpredictable twists or moments of delicious strangeness made one sit up and take notice, indicating a potential for breaking free and going beyond the generally efficient tone.

Týnek's performance credits include performing with Lucinda Childs, and "ScENes" initially suggested a juicier, less fanatical version of Lucinda Childs approach, just as Michael Galasso's music sounds like a cross between lush Baroque violin compositions and the churning continuity of Philip Glass. It's more limpid and haunting than most of Glass, and much more pristine in its texture.

Some of Týnek's titles for the dance's six sections — the initial letters of which spell out the word "scenes" — sent me to my dictionary, where I learned that "Nympholepsy" means "a demoniac enthusiasm held by the ancients to seize one bewitched by a nymph" or, more simply, "a frenzy of emotion." That was the title for the section in which the dance really broke free of its more neat, safe arrangements, as one by one all six dancers entered in heavy, draped long crimson skirts that were short in front so that they would hold them out to the sides and move unencumbered. Týnek arranged the dancers into artful clusters, with the skirts providing sculptural effects. Suddenly, one of the women was raised up and seemed borne by an endless expanse of the red fabric. This shift into the unexpected and mysterious was welcome, and elevated the dance into more imaginative terrain.

There was neatly patterned, at times hypnotic action in his second section, "Circus" — subtitled "a quartet for six" in that we saw duets and double duets, interchangeably performed by all six dancers, with never more than four onstage together. The central circle of light into which they scooted for brief encounters before being pulled back to the wings became an active participant, establishing the centripetal pull of the movement. Galasso's shimmering arpeggios provided a seamless, buoyant impetus to the increasingly hypnotic activity.

I also needed to check on the meaning for "Strobilation," the title Týnek gave to the concluding section, in which the accumulated comings and goings of the six evoked an

image of colliding orbits in outer space. Turns out it has nothing to do with strobe lights (an association I was tempted to make, especially since a strong glowing light was shined toward the audience from upstage center to open and close the section) but refers to "asexual reproduction by transverse division of the body into segments which develop into separate individuals." This must be a vestige of Týnek's initial studies in the natural sciences, before he turned to dance, as a student at Bard College.

In this conclusion to the half-hour dance, all the dancers repeated a motif seen earlier in the piece — seated on the floor with one leg bent in front and one behind, they bounced forcefully on the front knee — which looked harsh and brutal. They wound up in a quick burst of unison, all pointing upwards, before exiting one by one, leaving one petite woman to bring the work to a surprisingly casual end.

Týnek is thinking big in "Košile," a 45-minute work inspired by a 19th-century collection of Czech ballads that draws on "often gory fables based on village life and superstitions," according to the program note. The four women (in the cast of eight) are the ones who undergo tribulations and make important emotional journeys in the course of the work's twelve sections. One cannot always identify literally what is transpiring, but things are a bit off kilter right away in the first section (set to a gorgeous Paganini sonata for guitar and violin), in which the women appear vulnerable, supportive and consoling as each holds a large lily in her mouth as they cradle and lean on one another as four gleaming white shirts lie spread out in the corners.

Eden Mazer was the first to seize the dramatic spotlight, rendered helpless as the other dancers became a faceless ensemble manipulating her. Two women (Alexandra Berger and Elisa Osborne, I believe) then became the next protagonists, moving in fluid, supple unison marked by oddly held arm gestures, as the other six paired up to interact with the shirts — brandishing them, twisting them into rope-like coils, or entwining with them like partners. In the latter sections, the fourth woman (Laurel Lynch) was initially surrounded, then ensnared and trapped by the others.

I welcomed the oddity and elements of surprise in this work, although they surfaced more on the conceptual level rather than in the movement vocabulary. The pristine

clarity that marked "ScENes" gave way to more spontaneity and some intriguing partnering, but about halfway through, an ensemble section of mostly yoga-derived movements felt formulaic, lacking any gut-driven, dramatic impetus. It could have used a touch of the gory quality alluded to in the program. As the work went on, the increasingly convoluted maneuverings with the ever-present white shirts, while often ingenious and clever, rarely reached a level of metaphoric suggestion. In the program, Týnek quotes a stanza from one of the ballads that indicates these are wedding shirts, but the specific flavor and tensions of these people's society was left vague, so these ritualistic entanglements had their intriguing movements, but lacked a fuller context.

The wide-ranging musical selections, including four more Galasso selections towards the end, were mostly melodic and often plangent, except for one harsher one that sounded like spooky movie music. Perhaps their variety added to the "Košile"'s lack of defining cohesiveness.

Týnek's design collaborators contributed significantly to both works. Karen Young's gleaming costumes of teal and dark blue, with bits of gossamer fabric overlaid in certain sections, were sleek and interesting for "ScENes," and in "Košile," her brown and rust tops and pants in soft fabric suggested both non-nonsense practicality and a touch of peasant associations. Roderick Murray's lighting added many dramatic touches and often placed the dancers in a mysterious, glowing realm. It changed frequently but subtly, remaining artfully unobtrusive.

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