

dance ●●●
March 19th, 2007

Dusan Tynek Dance Theatre

Connect the Dots

A choreographer with a painterly eye deconstructs Christian imagery

by Deborah Jowitt



A scene from Fleur-de-lis – ©Julie Lemberger

In the years following Dušan Týnek's arrival here from his native Czechoslovakia, he studied at Bard College with Aileen Passloff (a member of the iconoclastic Judson Dance Theater of the 1960s) and decided to become a dancer. In works made for the company he formed in 2003, you can see hints of what he absorbed from his studies with Merce Cunningham and his stint touring with Lucinda Childs's company. The physical facility that enabled him to dance with a variety of small groups blends with the aesthetic of letting drama (if any) emerge from the interplay of movement and form.

In programs and interviews, he hints at the ideas behind his dances, but leaves spectators room to interpret what they see however they like. The three sections of his striking new Fleur-de-lis (set to music by Heinrich von Biber and shown as part of the ongoing 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Festival) are titled "Annunciation," "Trinity," and "Resurrection." I hadn't read the program closely before seeing the piece. Re-envisioning it in

terms of the subtitles, I have a new perspective on why, in the first section, Matthew Dailey, Nicholas Duran, and Týnek spread their arms to stop Alexandra Berger, Eden Mazer, and Elisa Osborne from running away. I understand that the moment when the men crouch behind the seated women and enfold them could represent the descent of the Holy Ghost, and that the women "flying" athwart the men's shoulders can be construed as angels. In abstracting essentials, Týnek has also splintered the Annunciation in time, multiplying and fragmenting the participants (Mary, the Angel Gabriel, and the Holy Spirit).

In "Trinity," third persons insert themselves into duets. And in "Resurrection," the dancers lay one another out, run off unexpectedly, return in their underwear, and lie down as if to sleep (this graceless transition is apparently to facilitate the costume change). After Duran erupts into movement, they all rise and dance in individual ways in individual patches of space. But they come together in circles and chains and restate the metaphoric power of threesomes.

Týnek has excellent musical taste and a powerful sense of the pictorial. Elegantly designed, often surprising groupings and encounters are his strong suit. He's less adept at choreographing steps—that is, he's adept enough, but the movement sometimes looks conventional or not inevitable, as if he'd gotten carried away ringing changes on a seductive idea. There's a passage in his wonderfully resonant *Kosile*, when Alexandra Berger is entrapped by others in a snare made of their white shirts; holding the garments' sleeves, they circle her. Then for a few seconds, they interrupt their hostile walking with fancier steps. The showy passage isn't long enough to state the folk-dance-gone-cruel idea, and it breaks the intensity of what Týnek has established.

Costumes (by Karen Young) are crucial to both *Kosile* (2006) and *Nympholepsy*, an excerpt from *ScENes* (also 2006). In the latter, the dancers wear long, full, layered red skirts, shorter in front. They whip the fabric around and spread the side panels like winged creatures. When they cluster and lift Mazer high, she becomes a smug giantess in an immense garment.

The many sections of *Kosile*—finely lit by Roderick Murray and set to music by composers as diverse as, for example, Paganini, Moondog, and Michael Galasso—were inspired by ballads by the 19th-century poet Karel Jaromír Erben. White wedding shirts become instrumental in deconstructing village rituals. They do dress a half-glimpsed marriage ceremony, but, knotted together, they trap a persecuted woman and serve as a litter on which to bear the sick. Scattered, they cover the dead. At some point, I weary of the shirts, but at the same time, I'm impressed by how skillfully Týnek and the performers (including Ann Chiaverini and Aaron Walter) weave the dancing to produce rich images of community life.