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BESFI Reviews

A Scintillating Evening of Lyrical and Bravura Dancing

By Phillip L. Sciarillo

It is a rare event when the reality of a live dance performance lives up to the ballyhoo leading to the event. The Ballet Education and Scholarship Fund, Inc.'s (BESFI) 33rd annual gala at the Staller Center exceeded the most optimistic expectations. Opening with the fiery Flames of Paris Pas de Deux, Seiskaya principal Nicole DiFiore and guest artist Boyko Dossev of the Boston Ballet were well suited to the intricate footwork and danced the uplifting score with energy and panache. Dossev's solo was flawless, and DiFiore finished the coda with a long flurry of well executed fouettes.

The Bluebird Pas de Deux featured future stars Danielle Lovetro and Mac Gershfield. Lovetro's long sinewy lines and marvelous extensions contributed to a series of dazzling Italian fouettes. Gershfield's successive entrechat-six combinations had the audience applauding regularly. Together the couple was enchanting. Seiskaya principal, Anna Craddock, departed from the classical genre with a neoclassical rendition of Massenet's Manon. A dancer completely in control of every nuance, she performed the solo variation with fluidity and grace displaying her ample facilities along the way.

A character ballet selection, Zhok, set on sixteen dancers is folk dance based and is a dance with verve full of rapidly changing line formations with brilliant color reflected from the fluttering sequin trimmed costumes.

Through the Glass is a contemporary dance variation executed with energy and agility by Seiskaya principal Alexandra Palma. Large jumps, rapid turns and an emotion laden theme are wrapped in this vocal rendition by Stoned Sour. Drawn from the Victor Hugo novel, the Hunchback of Notre Dame, the La Esmeralda Pas de Deux matched Seiskaya featured soloist Alexandra Tsivitis as Esmeralda and guest artist Barry Kerollis of BalletX as her suitor, Gringoire.

With its lusty musical score, the pas depicts a joyful street scene and is a delightful unbridled romp of bravura dancing. Well matched physically, the couple in turn displayed technical flashes that engaged the audience.

Act II opened with what can only be described as a sensational rendition of the White Swan Pas de Deux with Anna Craddock as the White Swan opposite Boyko Dossev. The pas was mesmerizing. Craddock executed each movement with grace and control projecting the vulnerability and torment of Odette. Dossev, a vaunted interpreter of classical repertoire, was extraordinary in his partnering guiding his ballerina effortlessly with great tenderness. At the conclusion of the piece, the only response that



Seiskaya principal Anna Craddock and guest artist Boyko Dossev were mesmerizing in the White Swan Pas de Deux.

Seiskaya Ballet principal Alexandra Palma and guest artist Barry Kerollis were electric together in the Le Corsaire Pas d'Esclave.



was left to us all, was, WOW!

The great Marius Petipa choreographed numerous ballets, but also reset several established works such as Satanilla which he staged in St. Petersburg in 1866. Satanilla, sent to earth by the devil, falls in love with new master, Count Fabio, who has made a deal with the devil. She eventually sacrifices herself in order for his soul to be saved. Mac Gershfield returns partnered by Marianna Spentzos for the pas. The pair make a strikingly attractive couple with complementary classical lines and an excellent sense of musicality. Gershfield again regaled the audience with his budding technical prowess completing a series of gallops with several pirouettes. Not to be outdone, Spentzos was equally brilliant executing a difficult series of hops in front attitude showing off her strength en pointe. A whimsical contemporary dance, Arrival of the Birds, choreographed by former Seiskaya Ballet principal Alexis Lucena, was set on Nicole DiFiore and featured soloists Alexandra Tsivitis and Brianne Colon. Synchronized movements and picturesque arabesques earned the piece a very warm reception from the audience. Colorful is an understatement when describing the character dance Persian. Twenty young dancers attired in red, blue, purple and yellow costumes adorned with spherical tufts of yellow in their hair, cavorted merrily in front of a full cyclorama backdrop of a Persian city delighting young and old.

Based on a poem by Byron, the Le Corsaire Pas d'Esclave depicts the beautiful Gulnare, who has been enslaved, being sold at auction. In a fetching dance, she entices the pasha to buy her. Chemistry between dance partners is essential in creating the magic that is ballet. Alexandra Palma and Barry Kerollis were electric together. Both dancers are secure technicians with a wonderful sense of timing. Kerollis carried off several lifts seemingly effortlessly. Palma's turns were impeccable with nary a miscue. They seemed to be made for this pas. Each dancer's variation was a tour de force with high ballon in leaps and multiple turn combinations. Palma finished the coda with 32 fouettes sticking the landing as an exclamation point to a great performance.

Act III was not to be overshadowed by what preceded. Valia Seiskaya has choreographed nearly twenty ballets, each set to showcase the dancers upon whom the original was set. Forest, set to a Bizet score, tells the tale of a careless smoker setting the forest on fire. The ensuing battle between Fire (Palma) and Water (Craddock) is a bravura display of technical excellence. The two eclipsed all previous renditions of the ballet with their taunt struggle and masterful control. The plight of the animals in the Forest brought several noteworthy performances particularly: Alexandra Berti and Alexandra Tsivitis (Swans), Jade Donnelly (Snake), Sydney Essex (Deer), Brianne Colon (Butterfly) and Kristina Diaz (Bird). Forest was riveting and has moved up several notches on the all-time favorites list. A hearty "Bravo!" to the dancers and Valia Seiskaya for a wonderful evening.