

# Companies step through Humphrey, Limon legacy

Save the premieres for another show. Two recent dance performances demonstrated the value of reviving repertory that hasn't been seen in a while. One common denominator was the brilliant legacy of the late modern choreographers Doris Humphrey and Jose Limon. Another was the satisfying spectacle that emerges when large num-

bers of dancers come together in the same space. Last weekend, Boston Conservatory Dance Theater, under the erudite artistic direction of Yasuko Tokunaga, offered three works that clearly were intended to challenge the technical and artistic skills of the students. Both the dancers and the musicians succeeded marvelously, though one imagines they were quite exhausted after their fourth and final show on Sunday afternoon.

The program opened with a daunting test of endurance, the "Pas de Six" and "Tarantella" from Act III of August Bournonville's 1842 "Napoli." To modern audiences, Bournonville's distinctly Danish style can seem schizophrenic. Either the dancers are moving through perfectly symmetrical, slow sequences that are the epitome of restraint, or they must fly around the stage in long combinations of fast steps accompanied by an often banal and insistent score.

Certain students demonstrated a natural affinity for this style. Shannon Plumstead's grand jetes were buoyant and effortless, her upper torso direction entirely exacting, and she projected an honest smile throughout the second variation, which is no small feat. Travis Magee was remarkably articulate with each phrase of the fourth variation, and he made one see the importance of the downbeat in Bournonville. Both Catherine Ferri and Ashley Kohl approached the material with reckless gusto, setting the en-

semble up for a rousing, tambourine-filled tarantella to finish.

Murray Louis' "Schubert Suite," set to the ever-popular "Trout Quintet," followed, an oddity from 1977 that centers on virtuosity and architecture, making it a good companion for the Bournonville. The audience missed much of the subtle humor in the piece, even in the final movement, where the movement mimics a school of fish traveling against a strong current. Louis (who came to the Conservatory to set the piece) made this inventive dance well before Mark Morris' numerous settings of Schubert, and it deserves to be seen more often.

As does Limon's "A Choreographic Offering," though there are few ensembles capable of performing this lengthy, austere masterpiece from 1964. The Boston Conservatory dancers and musicians didn't bite off more than they could chew for their program finale, however. This was a glorious staging by Jennifer Scanlon, and certainly the



PROMETHEUS dancers perform the epic 'Apokalypsis.'

most ambitious piece seen at the Boston Conservatory Theater in the last decade.

An hour long, it's possibly Limon's biggest choreographic undertaking as well. Made for 23 dancers and set to Bach's "A Musical Offering," the piece is a loving homage to his mentor and colleague Humphrey, incorporating excerpts from many of her dances.

It's encouraging to see that the dance technique that emerged from Humphrey and Limon is being taught well at the Boston Conservatory, as evidenced by Sunday's performance. Sarah Nachbauer, in particular, deserves praise for her exceptional command of the style.

Two hours after the Sunday matinee at Boston Conservatory, Prometheus Dance offered its epic "Apokalypsis" at the Boston Center for the Arts Cyclorama, the final performance of a six-show run. Seeing them back to back, one realizes that the similarities between this piece and Limon's "A Choreographic Offering" are astonishing.

"Apokalypsis" premiered three years ago at the Emerson Majestic Theatre. Restaged in the vast Cyclorama with a cast of 25 dancers, Beth Galston's eerie white birch tree environment and Linda Taylor's wide-ranging lighting design, the dance has become, ironically, more intimate.

Like Humphrey and Limon, Prometheus artistic directors Tommy Neblett and Diane Arvanites-Noya use a highly expressive movement vocabulary to investigate serious social issues. "Apokalypsis" centers on forced exodus and the perseverance of the human spirit.

A scene in the latter half, set to an excerpt from Verdi's "La Forza del Destino," was a powerful climax that summarized the Prometheus aesthetic.

For many years, Neblett and Arvanites-Noya have been making intimate, disturbing duets for themselves that display psychological bravery.

Choreography for their ensemble often amplifies their own intricate personal relationship to each other, and at Prometheus performances, that feeling resonates throughout the audience like a rock thrown suddenly into still water.

## Dance

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