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TOP STORY

## Review: Miami City Ballet proves to be at top of its game

By Lily Watkins Special to The Post and Courier May 26, 2018 Updated 17 hrs ago



Miami City Ballet's Jennifer Lauren and Renan Cerdeiro in Sir Kenneth MacMillan's "Carousel Pas de Deux."

Daniel Azoulay

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Any balletomane can agree: a George Balanchine work always starts a program off on the right foot, and Miami City Ballet's Saturday matinee was no exception. After a much-lauded Spoleto Festival USA opening comprised solely of Jerome Robbins' pas de deux in honor of his centennial, the company's second program offers a mix of choreographers, ranging from legendary masters to their more contemporary proteges.

When the curtain rises on Balanchine's "Walpurgisnacht Ballet" we see a stage full of women dressed in various shades of purple, their hair pulled back in low ponytails with matching ribbons, gently swaying to a familiar waltz. Only two of the 24 women in this cast sport the traditional bun, and while there is one male dancer — Renato Penteadó — his role is largely limited to playing cavalier to the ethereal Katia Carranza, whose ability to suspend every movement and nearly float across the floor caused sighs of admiration from the audience.

Nathalia Arja, the second principal woman, offered an energizing contrast, performing fearless hops on pointe nearly a foot off the floor with an easy, magnetic smile. The true treat of this work, however, is the finale, where the women charge back on stage, hair down, leaping with near reckless abandon. Never have I seen this movement performed with equal precision and vigor, a true testament to the strength and tenacity of Miami City Ballet's corps de ballet.

While "Walpurgisnacht Ballet" is delicate and traditionally feminine, Sir Kenneth MacMillan's "Carousel Pas de Deux" offers an aggressive juxtaposition. Featuring choreography from Carousel's 1994 revival, this piece moves the program into a more pedestrian landscape, presenting a much darker relationship between the couple.

While at times the partnering seems clumsy, the emotion of the movement and commitment to character is captivating, and Chase Swatosh steals the show with a number of stunning passes of leaps, filling the entire stage. When the curtain dropped, the men in the audience erupted with cheers.

Following the first intermission is Alexei Ratmansky's "Concerto DSCH," an early work from 2008. The large cast is dressed in bold orange and red, with a trio in royal blue. The piece had an almost relentless push of energy. The first movement is so full, it is difficult to know where to look; it is a kaleidoscopic picture, with dancers moving in sharp diagonals then whirling circles.

Next, a duo in pale green floats into the group, like lovers lost in their own world, occasionally noticing the rest of the cast before locking eyes once more. Employing a classical ballet vocabulary, the dancers make quirky gestures that lend humor to the piece, as when one male dancer does at least 20 consecutive jumps with flat feet and straight knees, staring down the audience as the rest of the cast dances around him undeterred.

The final work is “Heatscape,” a Justin Peck original for Miami City Ballet, choreographed in 2015 and featuring a stunning background by Charleston’s own Shepard Fairey. From the moment the curtain rises there is palpable excitement in the theater as the dancers stand silhouetted against the backdrop then run downstage.

A true master of patterns, Peck creates choreography that uses his cast to the fullest, moving them seamlessly from small groups to unison sections. These full cast moments are perhaps the most spectacular: they move together perfectly timed, but each dancer brings a unique quality to the movement, adding a joyous richness not often seen in classical ballet.

Each piece in this program is exceptionally crafted and performed, but it is the journey from one to the next that leaves the strongest impression. In an ever-changing dance landscape, Miami City Ballet has the talent, versatility and foresight to remain a leader.

Reviewer **Lily Watkins** is a dancer, dance instructor and writer in Charleston.