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Utah Repertory Dance Theatre

Curtis Carter

Marquette University, curtis.carter@marquette.edu

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Utah Repertory Dance Theatre
October 30, 1976

The Utah Repertory Dance Theatre, based at the University of Utah, is one of the few dance companies outside of New York to gain professional recognition. Their October 30 performance at the Wisconsin Union Theatre in Madison indicates that the dancers have improved considerably since their previous Wisconsin appearances. They have lost the slightly amateurish look that characterized their work a few years ago, but the company's choice of choreography fails to display their dancing skills to full advantage.

The program included four works: McKayle's "Nocturne, 1953", Steele's "Synapse, 1974", Wimmer's "Lost and Old Rivers, 1976", and Lubovitch's "Session, 1975". Of these, all but the latter falls short on the side of creativity and rarely exceeds the level of "competent" works one expects from good graduate students. Perhaps the company justifies its inclusion of these works on the basis that the repertory concept should provide opportunities for growing choreographers to display their works; and there is something to be said for that argument. But the results seem to compromise the full potential of the company.

An exception to the above remarks is Lar Lubovitch's "Session", which stands on its own choreographic merits. The ten dancers who perform "Session" gather in a rehearsal hall; the barre stands behind them draped in rehearsal clothes, sweaters, and miscellaneous items. The dance gives an impressionistic view of the rehearsal experience, but its attractiveness comes from the swiftly contrasting movements of threes, fours, singles, and at times the entire group. Vocal "ahs", "yesses", and "ya-ta-dahs" accompany the movements as different groups of dancers rehearse their respective parts or watch as others do theirs. I liked the frieze and fall-out movements of the piece, but the most compelling were the sharply punctuated rhythmical intersections of dancers toward the end of the piece. The performance picks up in both flow and speed as the dancers' bodies build in intensity like the force in a well-run rehearsal. By the end, the swiftly intersecting bodies have carved out in visual space a very pleasant image of "Session".

"Lost and Old Rivers", choreographed by company member Lynne Wimmer, uses Brahms' "Lieberslieder Waltzes" and alludes to paintings of Picasso and Manet. The dance consists of four choreographic "pictures" that realize in movement the frozen pictorial images of the painters. The choreographer's statement is about sexuality. After Manet, one of the episodes shows two boys and a girl on a picnic. The

dominant Victorian mood of this scene, as well as others, suggests a restrained attitude. The boys, walking in a stilted manner, carry in the girl awkwardly elevated above their heads. They hold her stiffly as an object. Her efforts to win their attention gives way to the attraction of the boys to one another. The choreographer's treatment of Picasso's "Two Women on the Beach" underscores the searching quality of the work as it shows the two dancers, side by side, always looking for something out of reach or lost. They explore each others' bodies, abandon their blouses, and dance "topless" until the dance ends. On the face of it, their nudity did not add substantially to the choreographer's statement.

"Synapse", choreographed by Karen Steele and performed by Steele and Michael Kelly Bruce, is a beautifully lit love duet showing the familiar struggle of man and woman. The dance has the quality of an animal mating ritual -- a battleground of the sexes. There is, however, no "sexist" division emphasizing strength or position. Each one, male and female, carries the other and manifests equally threatening gestures, stalking, testing and finally coming together in a dramatic leap that intends to end the dance in mid-air by blacking out the lights at the high point of the leap. The problem is that the dance does not get beyond the state of an exercise. It begins promisingly, but it ends unresolved.

Donald McKayle's "Nocturne" which opened the program shows off the dancers' bodies more for their own sensuous sake than for the development of movement. Their yellow costumes accent the attractiveness of the bodies, but the movement is in gross strokes that are devoid of any idea or purpose. We have come to expect more than a mere display in an age of dance.

-- Curtis L. Carter

