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REVIEW

ballet.*magazine**New York City Ballet**'Coppelia'**April 2009**New York, David H. Koch Theater**by Eric Taub*

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I'm expecting a bolt of lightning to strike me dead for betraying the memory of Patricia McBride, but I'll say it anyway: Tiler Peck is the greatest Swanilda I've seen. Last Thursday night she improved upon the performance that had impressed me so last winter. She's pretty, a canny actress, and she wields her formidable technique like a scalpel. Of course this "girl with the enamel eyes" should have that attribute adorned with eyelashes so thick you could use them to semaphore, and also, the only appropriate way for her to peer through a waist-high keyhole is to lock her legs, bend over at the waist and present the audience with her charmingly pert derriere. It's not that Peck's very, very pretty, and a great actress (she is), or that she's got formidable technical chops (she does), but how thoroughly she deploys each quality in service of the other.

In the first act, the opening mime, in which she sets the mise en scene for us audience members who can follow such things, was crystal-clear, with bemusement ("he's in love with her?"), exasperation ("How dare you ignore me!"), and carefree resignation ("Whatever. I'm gonna dance now.") following each other in happy progression. How can a dancer not look adorable banging her fists in anger against an invisible wall while bourreeing furiously?

Among the prettiness of Rouben Ter-Arutunian's designs, Delibes' ravishing score and the happy hubbub of Mazurka, Czardas, sundry friends and pink-tutued



cherubs from SAB, I kept on noticing Peck's remarkable lightness on her feet. After she (adorably) investigates the commotion from Dr. Coppelius' workshop (through the aforementioned waist-high keyhole), she rushes back to the villagers at center stage to report on what she's seen, her excitement bubbling up into a sweet little, tippy-toe pas couru run. A glittering pas couru is an important arrow in every ballerina's quiver, but I've never before seen a dancer float so weightlessly, as if Peck were being carried aloft for an instant by the crest of her own soaring emotions. I barely noticed that her toes were touching the stage, let alone carrying her weight.



Tiler Peck and Andrew Veyette in *Coppelia*  
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In Swanilda's third-act solos, between the technically hard bits, there's lots of surprisingly simple pointework: slow-motion chassés on pointe, dégagés into pas de bourrees. In other words, noodling around on pointe to Delibes' plucky melodies. For Megan Fairchild, City Ballet's ranking Swanilda, these patches can seem vast and dry as the Sahara. She's not especially musical or witty, and wanders in the wilderness when she must draw on these qualities more than her quiet yet formidable technique. That's not to say Fairchild's a bad actress she's a fine Swanilda but when it comes to expressing character and personality through her dancing, rather than layered atop it, she needs some work.

Not Peck. Again, her light-footedness was remarkable: her feet played teasingly with each other as much as with the music (Peck knows just how much rubato she can get away with at any moment, and chooses those moments, um, impeccably). Her dancing reminded me that the step's called a chassé because the back foot chases the front, and her bourrees became a witty dialog between left and right. Surmounting all was her supremely confident carriage and radiant smile. Swanilda should look pleased with herself by the third act; she's won all of her battles. In her "hard bits," Peck was brilliant: attitude turns changing from front to back with a saucy fillip through retiré, rock solid multiple pirouettes of all descriptions, and, always, her delicate, precise and witty footwork. (Her traveling brisé volées in the



first act were a particular treat.) Her second act, when she impersonates the living doll, Coppelia, was a triumph of biting characterization and bravura character-dancing.

Peck's Franz was Andrew Veyette. He plays the handsome, dim bumpkin to perfection blissfully unaware that his infatuation with the doll Coppelia is ruining his chances with Swanilda, or that if you want to get the girl you probably shouldn't pin a living butterfly to your chest before her eyes because it makes a pretty button. His charm helped efface his occasional technical lapses, as he has not an ounce of épaulement and had some trouble in the fiendish third-act solo originally from Balanchine's *Sylvia Pas de Deux*. He's not the first man to struggle with those repeated double tours into second. But if his shoulders look as if they'd been injected with cement, at least it's lightweight epoxy his bounding leaps fit perfectly with Franz's carefree nature. He made a fitting complement for Peck's polish, and handled her easily, for the most part, in their third-act adagio, although the setup for her downstage-right balances had more wobbly supporting hands than I like to see (actually, I've never seen these done better than by Benjamin Millepied and the dear departed Alexandra Ansanelli).



Tiler Peck and Andrew Veyette in *Coppelia*  
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Adam Hendrickson, a bravura soloist when not in character roles, was a wistful Dr. Coppelius, more dreamer than would-be evil magician. Coppelia's friends were all prettily danced and acted. Ana Sophia Scheller led the pink-clad children in the glorious third-act waltz. Deana Abergel was a breath of fresh air as Prayer (too modest, perhaps, to trouble the almighty with a wish for a secure penchée for her solo's end), and Ashley Laracey a vibrant red Spinner. Andrews Sill kept the orchestra rolling merrily along, especially in the ever-lively first-act Mazurka and Czardas.

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