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REVIEW

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*Company C
Contemporary Ballet**'Akimbo', 'The Little Ballet',
'You Don't Know What Love Is',
'Vespers', 'Sarabanda', 'Dioscures',
'Boink!'**May 2009
Walnut Creek, Dean Leshner Center**by Renee Renouf*

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The seven-item program Company C presented at the Dean Leshner Center for the Performing Arts, Walnut Creek May 15 echoed the earlier viewing at San Francisco's Cowell Theater at Fort Mason. Relying on recorded music, the evening commenced with the third Twyla Tharp work in its repertoire, *The Little Ballet*, originally a vehicle for Mikhail Baryshnikov with American Ballet Theater. The male role, essayed by Kevin Delaney requires an approach not just of technical mastery but a debonair insouciance, the fall out from such mastery. I do not remember the red discrepancy from the other three women's costumes. If faithful reproductions, they are not one of Santo Loquasto's greatest inventions.

Artistic Director Charles Anderson is adept in venturing into subject matter new to his pleasant command of the classical idiom, but the results are not always convincing. However, He enjoys

two dramatic exponents in Beth Kaczmarek and newcomer Aaron Jackson as two of a trio in *You Don't Know What Love Is*. With Mario Espinoza as the third, they depicted the torment of a woman who can't make up her mind between her passionate cross-racial attachment and the more conventional route to a Caucasian partnership.

In *Akimbo* Anderson resurrected a work part of which he apparently created while still living in New York; two parts were premiered this spring in Rohnert



Park. With the title's definition, the grouping of Amazing Grace, Pano de Costa and White Man Sleeps certainly lives up to the moniker. But why, oh why, to Amazing Grace, have three girls prance around strutting their hips and displaying their curves to one of the world's best known confessional hymns? The knowledge of its origins, created by a former master mariner of a slave ship, has imprinted itself too strongly, as well as its sustaining role in African-American churches.

Following intermission, Gianna Davy with Mario Espinosa reprised David Grenke's Vespers to the effective, raspy voice of Tom Waits singing every verse of Waltzing Matilda, which must be Australia's unofficial national anthem. Davy was required to be totally limp, Espinosa trying to manipulate her back into life. A difficult, absorbing pas de deux with Davy hefted, pulled, swung and dragged by Espinosa's frantic efforts, Vespers was nominated for an ensemble Izzy for the 2007-2008 season. Repetition simply verified how remarkable and well interpreted a work it is.



Gianna Davy in *Akimbo*
© Susan Vogel

Another Anderson premiere this spring was Sarabanda, a mercifully brief solo assigned to Ashley Ivory, with musical credit to Corelli, and mistakenly Sarabanda. Obviously intended as an elegy with two batteries of candles, Ivory's decollete costume verged on Victoria's Secret for Juliet following her rendezvous with Romeo instead of a garment worn for a memorial.

In Dioscures Nikolai Kabaniaev gave Laura Rutledge, one time member of Indianapolis' International Ballet, her first major role after six seasons with Company C; her flexibility in torso and port de bras were seen to advantage in addition to her sure balance and strong pointes. Kabaniaev's ballet was skillfully lit by Kate Boyd and set to Yves Prin's music. He also obviously has been influenced by the remarkable talents of Tina Kay Bohnstedt, his former chief exponent.

With three other couples, Disocures displayed striking groupings, interesting contrasts, but never wound up with a statement, a mood, or something verging on completion. The ballet again demonstrated Beth Kaczmarek and Aaron Jackson share a similar attack and dramatic flair; they are exciting to watch, particularly because Jackson not only moves beautifully, but his finish moves out his fingertips. He also is the first African American to join the company.

Val Caniparoli created Boink! for the Lawrence Pech Company in 2002; with that ensemble now quiescent, Company C had it mounted by Wendy Van Dyck. The medley of 'Sixties tunes was created with Caniparoli's slightly skeptical air, provoking chuckles before and again with this company, such as Mucha Muchacha with Rutledge and Grant Spencer. As with the Pech ensemble, Boink! made an excellent evening's closing.



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