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REVIEW

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*Atlanta Ballet**'Don Quixote'**May 2009**Atlanta, Cobb Energy Performing Arts Center**by Pamela Gaye*

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*Don Quixote*, the Atlanta Ballet's final season performance, showcased the talents of dancers Christian Clark as Basilio and Christine Winkler as Kitri in what proved to be a stellar performance accompanied by the Atlanta Symphony in the posh Cobb Theater for the Performing Arts.

On the whole, The Atlanta Ballet shows flawless technical ranges in containing many dancers who truly give their all to the art of performance. Definitely a dancer to watch is Christian Clark who in the lead role of Basilio exhibited broad technical ranges, consisting of effortless entrechat with rond-de-jambe en l'air and daring multiple pirouettes, all perfectly aligned. Christine Winkler performed with technical strength such difficult steps as Italian fouettés that dazzled audiences through solo performance as well as creating delicate lines in pas de deux greatly pleasing Atlanta audiences.

One marvels at the talent of these dancers, whether in classical or character roles. As repertoire, *Don Quixote* catered to both ranges. In character roles, I watched Jonah Hooper in the role of the ardent, clumsy suitor, Gamache, which contrasted vividly with the dramatic interplay exhibited by Mark MacKillop as Don Quixote with his squire, Sancho Panza, playfully performed by Paolo Manuel de Sousa. Yet one cannot but notice the classical performance that often lacks perfect fifth positions, port de bras, and classical positioning of the head and torso that are staples of ballet performance.

And choreography by John McFall, according to notes accompanying the



performance, bore striking resemblance to standard Petipa choreography of classical variations throughout and particularly in Act II, whereas, in accompanying program notes, Petipa's name was not mentioned. Innovation does occur in this second Act, set in a Greek garden, where school children parading as nymphs perform postures that serve as an integral part of the staging. I nevertheless questioned, in Act III, the costuming of the bride in pink instead of, as in most conceptions of this tale, in white. Where McFall most excels is the creation of small ensemble dances, particularly of male trios that, threaded throughout the work, feature performances by Paul O'Connor, Corwin Robinson, Kevin Silverstein that were well-staged in serving as intermediary between the danced ensembles of the corps and soloists.



Atlanta Ballet's *Don Quixote*  
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Peng Yu Chen is certainly a dancer to watch whose classical style is projected through a personality that shone forth her role as friend of Kitri. Nathan Griswald's strong presence as Espada, the matador also foregrounded the technical skill of the male ensemble that included dancers Joshua Reynolds, Brian Wallenberg, and others. De Sousa's earthy performance as Sancho Panza contained prankish gestures and one pose resembling a cartwheel, that formed an interesting contrast with MacKillop as Don who aimlessly meandered to various regions of the stage, as in a daze, although sword in hand, to reminisce decaying institutions of classical Spain, even as they crumble. Dulcinea, gracefully performed in veil by Kelly Prather complemented MacKillop's performance in symbolizing the eternal, ethereal feminine ideal. Staging-wise, the varying tone of performances created in this ballet through changes of movement style never failed to enchant, even as more refined tenets of classical style at times seemed lacking.



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