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REVIEW

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*Ballet San Jose*

*Hidden Talents: 'Legends',  
'Languishing for Love',  
'The Way We Fall', 'Fem', '2-2 Tango'*

*February 2009*

*San Jose, Center for the Performing Arts*

*by Renee Renouf*



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The Hidden Talents of Ballet San Jose number five: four company dancers and one recently retired. In order of presentation February 26 at San Jose's Center for the Performing Arts they are: Tiffany Glen –Legends; Preston Dugger – Languishing for Love; Aleksandra Meijer – The Way We Fall; Dalia Rawson – Fem; Karen Gabay – 2-2 Tango. The musical choices ranged from John Legend, Bjork, Loop Station to Gyorgy Ligeti played by San Francisco Ballet pianist Michael McGraw to a medley of Tangoes. The program also featured costumes by Azadeh, a San Francisco-based courturier.

Magnanimity, vision and common sense in a ballet company's artistic director is patent when providing main stage space for fledgling choreographic works by dancers active in the company. It's akin to Dennis Nahat's talent for

plucking technical whizzes and lively personalities from the international competitions in Jackson, Mississippi, particularly when body silhouette is a trifle different from the Balanchine conventional proportions.

The novelty of the five choreographers was stimulus to the eye, augmented by the musical choices, seeing dancers appear in assignments throwing technical prowess in full relief and fuller exposure to corps dancers Amy Marie Briones and Shannon Bynum.

For Briones this occurred first in "Show Me," center and beginning of Tiffany



Glenn's *Legends*, where she accomplished with full sweeps of her legs, arabesques, developpes and attitudes; her turns were steady and her fingers filled and finished a phrase nicely. "Where Did My Baby Go?" provided a trio for Ramon Moreno, Seth Parker and Hao Bu portraying three lovers, Parker in uniform. Legend's "Coming Home" created a surging impulse for the eleven-dancer ensemble; there was no way to cut the music to sustain Glenn's initial use of her ensemble, however, laboring the ending effect, sharpened by Azadeh's choice of uniform white leotards for this final song. Glenn used space effectively, it was just length detracting from the work.



Cynthia Sheppard and Peter Hershey with Mirai Noda and Akira Takahashi in Tiffany Glenn's *Legends* (left to right; back to front)

© Robert Shomler

Preston Dugger's choice of Bjork gave an edge to this pas de deux between Maykel Solas and Shannon Bynum, with the first of two songs "107 Steps" given over entirely to Solas and his intense, brilliant execution, danced before a red leather sofa with a black foundation. Dugger, a technically adroit performer himself, gave Solas a workout, obviously relished, and anguished to the counts in the lyrics. This gave way to a wary Bynum in red-bordered side-slit black dress appearing upstage right, weary but provocative and obviously hungering for loving connection. Dugger elicited anguish and despairing attachment between the two to the strains of "I've Seen It All" with its words of world-wide travel until Bynum left the way she came; Solas, seated, reached for a bottle and a small tumbler. The two parts would make excellent displays in an international competition if either met the time constraints.

After the first intermission Loop Station provided Aleksandra Meijer's *The Way We Fall* musical background, with four couples in matching colors, the girls in Capri tights with bordered, filmy overskirts and wrap-like tops, the men in short tees and tights. Loop Station are duo musicians placed too prominently down stage right, the woman in a bronze-hued, plunging neckline, the man with a cello, she creating her own movement choreography to the distraction of the dancers and



choreography. I remember excellent partnering, but that singer kept distracting my eye.

Dalia Rawson's *Fem* was easily the most ambitious ballet of the evening. Dressed in mid-thigh unitards with Maria Jacobs-Yu was prominent in *Capriccio* No. 1, Kaleena Opdyke and Gwatkin were featured in a pas de deux and Jing Zhang with the ensemble. Rawson's ability to navigate Ligeti's structural complexities was admirably coherent. I also noticed the relative difficulty some company dancers with tight muscles experience in articulating a developpe from the inner thigh; a number of the men are longer in the waist than in the leg. All managed to dance a fast clip to the finale, the fiendish, demanding *Capriccio* No. 2.



Peter Hershey and Mallory Welsh in *Fem*; choreography by Dalia Rawson  
© Robert Shomler

Karen Gabay's 2-2 Tango, ended the program following the second intermission. Citing her parents' love of the dance, she also made effective use of Maximo Califano's Argentine background. As a yearning tango devotee, Fedora hat cocked to one side, fingers spread imploringly, he came out from the left side of the

auditorium to mount the stage and stalk through the nineteen dancers standing in silhouette fashion around the stage.

Amy Briones followed in Sentado, partnered by Rudy Candia, the third of Nahat's Cuban short, dynamic male dancers, providing stylistic departure from her earlier assignment. Ramon Moreno expanded his timing and comic acuity in Trabado with the sprightly assistance of Mirai Noda and Maria Jacobs-Yu, Gabay providing a great visual closing punch line.

Maykel Solas followed with his considerable fireworks before Karen Gabay and Raymond Rodriguez created an effective pas de deux between a cloaked vampire and his victim; Rodriguez wiped his mouth succinctly. It took more measures in the music for Gabay to expire than perhaps necessary.

The three Cubans then tried to engage Beth Ann Namey, Moreno and Solas displaying all forms of tricks, only to be bested by Candia's politeness and good manners.

Califano swooped around Namey and Hao Bo, and at one point managed to wrest her from Bo, but only briefly and then he swooped around the ensemble for the rousing end.



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written by Renee Renouf © [email](#)

design by [RED56](#)

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