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REVIEW

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*Nashville Ballet**'Adjustable Wrench', 'Sinatra Suite',
'Clowns and Others', 'Jungle'**February 2009
Nashville, TPAC Theater**by Pamela Gaye*

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Four short ballets were spotlighted during the spring season of the Nashville Ballet at the TPAC Stage in downtown Nashville. The performance reified the varying adaptations of traditional choreography to multiple textures and moods that are this company's forte. The evening's opener, *'Adjustable Wrench'* shows that, when Nashville Ballet gets going, it can really perform. Soloists Christopher Mohnani, Kimberly Ratcliffe, and Brian Williamson followed the whims of choreographer Paul Vasterling who created crisp patterns of jetes en diagonal, off-center pirouette turns and arabesques, all the while creating an ever-expanding embryo of eccentric patterns. Performed to a score by Michael Torke, the dance, as a metaphor for the continuous

reworking and twisting of the wrench instrument, spotlighted the endless capacity of the dancer's body to project bold aerial movements.

Yet by far the most touted work of the evening was *Sinatra Suite*, originally choreographed as pas de deux between Twyla Tharpe and Mikail Baryshnikov. Wearing tuxedo and gown against a stage cast in varying shades of grey, dancers Christine Rennie and Jon Upleger performed this staple of Tharpian choreography beset with many subtle and unseen challenges between dancers themselves and between dancer and choreographer. Movements are dramatic, yet filled with minimalist gesture; as such, they delve into off-center patterns of swaying forms and the sense that every port-de-bras or tendu has been exploited to its greatest potential. Although there is a spirit of improvisation throughout this work, its erratic yet carefree changes of posture imply, symbolically, images of relationships torn and unbroken Familiar Sinatra lyrics, such as 'My Way' caught Upleger and Rennie 'up close' foreshadowing a breathtaking presence in the duet, 'One More



for the Road.’ In this movement, they appeared first in unison, then in counterpoint, covering varying areas of the stage, gravitating first toward isolated spotlight poses and adagio movements, then coming together in embrace.

Clowns and Others, to choreography by Salvatore Aiello, in accordance with The Salvatore Aiello Trust, was a work accentuated by multi-colored spotlights amid dancers portraying movements of tightrope walkers and children with balloons, all juxtaposed with the various moods provoking laughter. *Clowns* relied on show images that passed from plastically conceived group formations to dancers individually exposed in stage space who huddle together, make faces at the audience, drift apart, then re-assemble again in structures that exact laughter emanating from a single solitary frieze.



Mary LaCroix, Andrea Vierra and Brendon La Pier in *Jungle*
© Heather Thorne



The evening’s final work, *Jungle*, to choreography by James Canfield, contained episodes of classical purity and rampant rambunctiousness, evidenced in the playful performances of dancers Sadie Bo Harris, Christine Rennie, and others. Most appealing was the work’s final scene where the dancers merge with scenery creating an effect that is balanced as a two-way camouflage. All in all, Nashville Ballet’s pristine style, coupled with effortless solo and ensemble images made this evening one to remember, embodying humor and even a touch of the miraculous.

