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Nacre Dance Company makes an exciting debut at The Egg

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ALBANY -- When Beth Hartle Fecteau announced that she was creating a regional dance company, most thought, "Is she nuts?" Dance is the poor stepchild, the neglected art. And with money so tight, there couldn't be a more inauspicious time. Though that is true, Nacre Dance Company is a happy addition to the Capital Region arts scene. On Saturday afternoon at The Egg, the company of 23 dancers (all female with the exception of one) embraced a wonderfully eclectic mix of pieces -- historical modern works with contemporary ones. The large number of dancers muddies Nacre's personality. However, the ensemble's inaugural performance was so polished that it raised hopes that Fecteau will hone its style, and thus its look and temperament.

Certainly, the creation of Nacre was a nod to Fecteau's own roots. She performed with Maude Baum and Company Dance Theatre, an ensemble that strives to preserve historical dances by such greats as Isadora Duncan alongside living and experimental choreographers like Vanessa Paige Swanson (another Baum disciple). Fecteau welcomed both Duncan and Swanson creations as well as a whole lot more.

Nacre is a dance historian's dream, as the majority of the program was handed over to important works that are rarely seen today. Fecteau, along

with a group of preservationists, staged the dances with loving care. And it was the earliest pieces that looked the best.

The curtain opened on "Air for the G String," created by Doris Humphrey in 1928 to the music by Bach. This delicate dance, as staged by Mino Nicolas, was a stunner. With Mary Beth Cole Hampshire at the heart, five in flowing silk robes floated about the stage as Greek statues come to life. Adding to this exquisite scene was the Willow String Quartet playing the music live with ethereal elegance.

That was followed by another Nicolas staging, this one of "Ballerina Real," a dance by Ted Shawn from 1918. Deb Rutledge danced the solo with piquancy and passion. This is a marvelous role for her, as it showed off her strength and sauciness. It is doubtful any dancers could have topped this interpretation.

The program grew better with "Bacchanal" by Duncan as staged by Jeanne Bresciani. This carefree and breezy celebratory dance captured the imagination with the cast appearing as woodland nymphs skipping and romping gleefully. It was beautiful.

So, too, was Swanson's new work for the company, "Still/Flowing." Fecteau chose well when she invited Swanson to be the company's first commissioned choreographer, as Swanson knows how to work with young dancers. She created a septet, to glorious choral music by Bruno Coulais, that was a sober but tender look at loss and its effects on the whole. Tinged in ritual, "Still/Flowing" spoke of the visceral or spiritual connections that remain even after a physical bond is severed.

Nacre dancers did not do as well with pieces that require a weightier sensibility. Etudes from Anna Sokolow's "Rooms" from 1955 and Donald McKayle's "Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder" from 1959 came off flat. These works are wrought with emotion that was sorely lacking here.

The dancers fared better with the pure dance studies of David Parsons and Danny Buraczeski's work. They looked especially lively in the Parsons etude, which required attitude and a go-for-broke attack that they executed with panache.

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