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Nacre @ the Universal Preservation Hall, 5/2/2010

May 2, 2010 at 8:30 pm by [Tresca Weinstein](#)

By Tresca Weinstein

Special to the Times Union

SARATOGA SPRINGS – The patchwork of sandstone and brick that lines the semicircular apse of the Universal Preservation Hall served as a gorgeous backdrop for Nacre’s spring concert Sunday afternoon.

The gradations of red, brown and deep purple, inset with two stained-glass windows, enhanced the visual impact of each dance and formed an evocative historic setting for work by legendary choreographers such as Isadora Duncan, Danny Grossman and Doris Humphrey. As artistic director Beth Hartle Fecteau pointed out in her introductory remarks, the company and the Hall share a mission: preservation—of, respectively, American modern dance and this majestic architectural landmark.

The two were perfect complements Sunday as Nacre’s 24 dancers—including high school students, recent college graduates with dance degrees and professional performers—displayed an impressive range in eight works spanning one hundred years of choreography.

Duncan’s “Ode to Apollo” (1910-1917) and “Soaring,” choreographed by Humphrey and Ruth St. Denis in 1920, felt like beautiful antiques—still lovely to look at but most definitely artifacts of their time. In the stately “Ode,” set to music by Franz Schubert, Lindsay Bogan is a high priestess leading a flock of maidens in wings and tunics as they prepare for the dawn. “Soaring” has a similarly ethereal quality, with five women expertly manipulating a swath of white fabric to form shimmering, parachuting shapes.

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Less appealing was Eleanor King's 1940s solo "Moon Dances, set to a dissonant composition by Arnold Schönberg. Her head and arms shrouded in tulle, Mary Beth Hampshire was wraith-like in choreography that was as pained and awkward as the music.

In contrast, some older works still look fresh and contemporary, like the spirited "Session for Six," Anna Sokolow's 1958 celebration of youth. The first half of the piece employs a playful vocabulary of movements—leaps, gran plies, prances and hops—performed in canon; the second half is loose and jazzy, studded with spins, hip swivels and flirty hand gestures. May O'Donnell's "Pursuit of Happiness," from 1976, with music by Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman and Woody Herman and the dancers outfitted in stars and stripes, is an explosion of jumps, splits, kicks, cartwheels and handstands that would have been perfectly at home on Broadway or a World War II USO tour. The middle section of the piece, an adorable duet danced beautifully by Hampshire and Edmund Metzold, takes place almost entirely on the floor.

Bringing the performance into the present, Rebecca Rabideau's commissioned work, "Little Sparrow," harmonized seamlessly with the other pieces on the program. Set to songs by Rosanne Cash, Irish DeMent, Gillian Welch and others, performed live by Albany's Jim Gaudet and the Railroad Boys, each of the five sections of lyrical, expressive choreography has a different emotional flavor. Carrie Brandis was a standout here, as in all the dances she appeared in, lending presence, charm and a natural, easy grace.

Each work was prefaced with a brief introduction providing context and backstory; for example, Fecteau explained that Grossman's "Ecce Homo (Behold the Man)" was inspired in part by ancient sculptures, many of which had no arms. Reflecting those images, Grossman had his dancers hold their arms frozen in a circle, fingertips touching.

The company takes the program to the Egg on Saturday for two performances, minus the Preservation Hall backdrop but with the rest of its pleasures intact.

Tresca Weinstein is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.

NACRE

When: 2 p.m. Sunday

Where: Universal Preservation Hall, 25 Washington St., Saratoga Springs

Program: "Ecce Etude," "Session for Six," "Limón Etude," "Soaring," "Ode to Apollo," "Moon Dances," "Little Sparrow," "Pursuit of Happiness"

Length: One hour and 40 minutes, one intermission

Repeats: 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday at The Egg, Empire State Plaza, Albany

Tickets: \$20; seniors and children, \$15

Info: 473-1845 or <http://www.theegg.org>



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