

The Reviews Archive

[Return](#) to previous page.

Doug Elkins and Friends

2009-07-13

A Few of his Favorite Things: Doug Elkins breaks it down and mixes it up with "Fraulein Maria" at the American Dance Festival.

First, a confession: I have never seen "The Sound of Music" all the way through. I know all the songs, of course, and enough of the story to get by. Needless to say, I was in the minority on Monday night, at the presentation of Doug Elkins and Friends' "Fraulein Maria" (running July 13 - 15 at the Reynolds Industries Theater).

"Fraulein Maria" is Elkins' deconstruction of "The Sound of Music," set to the original movie score by Rodgers and Hammerstein. The irreverent homage features three Marias, references to dance icons such as Martha Graham and Balanchine, and a broad array of movement styles from hip hop to contemporary dance, stepping to ballet, with some club dancing mixed in. From the beginning of the show, when the ringmaster conducted three sections of the audience in singing "Do-Re-Mi," the fast-paced montage of dance and music certainly seemed to have drawn in the audience. They laughed loudly at the sight of Maria breakin' it down instead of gliding smoothly over the hills and groaned sadly when Maria was sent away from the von Trapp family.

However, I spent most of the performance thinking "I don't get it." Why three Marias? Why this particular movement to that song? I was sure I was missing all sorts of jokes and references to the original movie (although my friend assured me later that I hadn't missed much). Towards the end of the dance, though, something clicked, and I saw what Elkins was trying to do. "The Sound of Music" has become something of a cultural phenomenon - the music, the story, the characters are so linked in our minds, and represent very personal memories and associations for many people. It has entered our shared consciousness. In Elkins' production, he strives to pull together elements of the dance world - and not just theatrical dance - that hold a similar place in our collective memory. "Fraulein Maria," then, has to do with cultural recognition, with movement patterns, personalities, interactions between dancers that we can feel a visceral connection to, whether we recognize Martha Graham in the Mother Abbess or not. This is our culture, these are our dances, this is us.

Certainly most of the audience felt that recognition, seemed to be caught up in both their own memories of the movie and their delight at this new rendition, and above all, were entertained. As a dance work, however, beyond the novelty of Maria in knee-pads or hip-hop goat-herds, I was disappointed. In this case, Elkins' originality and underlying intentions weren't enough to carry the dance. While most of the dancers were technically strong and engaging performers, the choreography often felt flat and too doggedly tied to the music - sometimes the dancers actually lip-synched the spoken words in the score. The dance had the feel of a recital; each "routine" introduced new movement material but with the same exaggerated showiness - big grins, slapstick humor, and stunts. Maybe I still missed something. Maybe, for all my probing, there wasn't all that much to "get."

American Dance Festival's 2009 performance season continues July 16-18 with the Paul Taylor Dance Company presenting "Beloved Renegade" (2008), "Mercuric Tidings" (1982), and "Scudorama" (1963) at the Durham Performing Arts Center.

[Return](#) to previous page.

[About](#) -- [Advertising](#) -- [Contact Us](#) -- [Homepage](#) -- [Letters](#) -- [Submit Letters](#)
[Links](#) -- [Resumes](#) -- [Reviews](#) -- [Review Archives](#) -- [Search](#) -- [Submit Reviews](#)

This site is free and open to any and all interested persons.
If you want to tell us who you are we would love to know that.

You can register with this site by sending an e-mail [here](#)

We will gladly provide you with information on site updates,
but, if you do not want to receive any emails just indicate that in your message.



Please send technical questions or comments about this site to the [WebMaster....](#)