

Published: Jul 18, 2009 05:31 AM

Modified: Jul 17, 2009 10:58 PM

Dance retrospective is exhilarating

BY ROY C. DICKS, Correspondent

DURHAM - The Paul Taylor Dance Company's program for this year's appearance at the American Dance Festival spans five decades of the choreographer's work, an impressive documentation of his staying power and versatility.

The program opens with the euphoric uplift of Taylor's 1982 "Mercuric Tidings," a three-part work for 13 dancers set to movements from early Schubert symphonies. The first part, with its constantly changing patterns, its rapid bursts of turns, leaps and lifts, and its tightly sprung energy, would be worth the ticket price alone.

All the Taylor signatures -- the heel-clicking scoots, the scissorlike struts, the U-shaped arms -- are beautifully melded into a joyous whole that demonstrates the potency of dance. Taylor's sensitivity to every musical nuance and mood, another long-established trait, adds further facets to this jewel-like work.

No Taylor program would be complete without one of his "dark" works. Here it's his early "Scudorama" (the name comes from a type of ragged, windswept cloud), which premiered at ADF in 1963.

Not performed anywhere since 1973 until this revival, the piece seems a commentary on disconnected, futile existence in modern life. The program note, quoting Dante's "Inferno," gives a clue to the Purgatory-like atmosphere, in which weary, listless dancers in street clothes are harried by other dancers in richly colored unitards. These latter appear to be resident creatures driven to pester and torture newly arrived souls by some unknown force, wiggling and jerking as they go about their tasks. Forlorn bodies crawling across the stage, a pulsating pile of dancers, and even the odd use of brightly patterned beach towels as shrouds, all create a mysterious world, greatly aided by Clarence Jackson's bleak jazz-classical score.

The final piece was Taylor's latest work, "Beloved Renegade," which takes its inspiration from two sources, Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" and Francis Poulenc's "Gloria." Taylor matches a quote to each of the six sections of the choral work, but he doesn't specifically try to comment on Whitman himself or to illustrate the religious function of the music. Instead, Taylor seems to be reviewing the poetic and spiritual life of an artist, moving from childhood innocence through romantic attachments to sorrows brought on by loss of friends and loved ones.

As the piece ends with the artist (the elegantly noble Michael Trusnovec) being led to his rest by an angelic figure (the gently shining Laura Halzack), it's easy to assume this is an overview of Taylor's own life and his acceptance of the inevitable. The work has a beatific simplicity and

serenity, trying for nothing new but reflecting Taylor's particular method of imparting art.

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What: Paul Taylor Dance Company

Where: Durham Performing Arts Center

When: 8 p.m. today

Cost: \$22-\$43

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