

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

SATURDAY, JULY, 17, 2010

REVIEW



Lisa Viola jumps over Richard Chen See, Silvia Nevjinsky, Takehiro Ueyama, Kristi Egtvedt, James Samson and Amy Young in Paul Taylor Dance Company's presentation of "Esplanade."

LOIS GREENFIELD

Paul Taylor brings class

By Roy C. Dicks
CORRESPONDENT

DURHAM — There was something immensely comforting about 80-year-old Paul Taylor coming on stage at the end of his American Dance Festival program Thursday.

Seeing him amid the dancers who had just performed two of his classics, along with his 132nd premiere, gave blessing to the past and saluted the future of this singular choreographer's body of work.

Since 1954, Taylor has continuously created significant works of wide-ranging mood and character, often enigmatic yet consistently popular. Thursday's program (repeated Friday night) offered two of Taylor's undisputed masterpieces.

"Sunset," Taylor's 1983 piece to elegiac music by Elgar, depicts interplay between six men in khaki uniforms and red berets and four

DETAILS

What: Paul Taylor Dance Company

Where: Durham Performing Arts Center, 123 Vivian St., Durham

When: 8 p.m. today (1 p.m. children's matinee)

Cost: \$22-\$45 (\$15.50 children's matinee)

Contact: 680-2787, www.dpacnc.com

women in white dresses. Although the piece begins airily, the soldiers playfully engaging the women and good-naturedly competing among themselves, there are notes of sadness and loss as it progresses. Fleeting images of men in the trenches and women caring for the wounded add moving underpinnings for this farewell to innocence.

Taylor's 1975 "Esplanade" turns everyday movement into high art. The dancers' spirited energy, as they skip, run

and jump to a Bach concerto, communicates an overwhelming joy in the upbeat sections and a heart-tugging tenderness in the quiet portions.

Sandwiched in between was Taylor's newest work, "Phantasmagoria," a 20-minute piece to music by anonymous Renaissance composers. It opens with dancers as Bruegel-inspired peasants in downtrodden poses and fists beating the air. But soon the mood turns sunny with couples gaily dancing, undeterred by the stern nun who chastised them.

Then there is a succession of seemingly unrelated characters: an Adam and Eve paired in glittering East Indian garb, complete with giant snake; a traditionally dressed Irish dancer, all high kicks and heel clicks; three Isadora Duncan look-alikes, diaphanous tunics floating; a stum-

bling bum drinking from a paper bag.

When the peasants return, they are first convulsed with plague but then return to their dancing. They exit, leaving the bum, who had tried joining in, waving for them to come back.

Compared to the others, the piece is slight, almost provocatively so in its simple steps and facile humor. But it could be Taylor's own sly wink at life and art: good times and bad, temptations and consequences, popular work and esoteric creation, unexpected inspiration and the hope that it lasts. A program quote about life being a dream gives the piece an additional organizing framework.

(Tonight's alternate program has three other Taylor classics: "Brandenburgs," "Runes" and "Syzygy.")

music_theater@lycos.com