

Dance Review

Retrospective shows Mateo facing the music

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Ballet Theatre of Boston's 10th-anniversary sampler of the works of founder Jose Mateo continued at the Emerson Majestic last night, proving once again that despite these financially troubled times for the arts, the resilience of this chamber-sized troupe is no fluke.

Music is Ballet Theatre of Boston's saving grace. The scores Mateo chooses to choreograph — a cycle of Brahms waltzes here, a concerto by Vivaldi there — underline his respect for ballet's inherently romantic and lyrical nature. Such works also give even Mateo's simplest combinations of steps heft and momentum. The dancers move on the shape of a phrase, and their musicality puts a bright gloss on their dancing even when the technique is flawed or the unison work doesn't quite fall into place.

Take "Delusions in 3/4 Time." Talya Salant, her hair cascading like New York City Ballet dancer Darci Kistler's, is a rose-petal-delicate adolescent, picking a flower off the ground and dancing with the moonlight as her partner. This ballerina, whose day job is nothing less demanding than being a senior at Harvard, is a sylphide in the making. Her freshness sets the stage for the series of aristocratic duets Mateo has devised for his company, moments that give the dancers, and especially the women, the opportunity to create vignettes of flirtation, bewilderment and tenderness. And when the ladies' pointe work falters, which it sometimes does, the men obligingly float them off the ground.

As Mateo has developed a story ballet repertory, he's become increasingly able to move large ensembles in convincing ways. "The Siren" replays the genre of classical "white ballet," exchanging a swan corps de

ballet or a flock of ghostly willis for a group of sirens in Grecian mini-chitons, luring a sailor to his doom. But if the story is warmed over, the ways Mateo works with the foreground and the background of his drama is not. Christopher DeNofrio, a young dancer distinguished by his open chest and nicely placed feet, is the sailor in dazzling white. As he listens to the temptresses' song, his hand curved at his ear, the sirens mass behind him, swaying with their hands to their mouths in a pantomime of singing. The juxtaposition creates two clear planes, linked by watery communication.

"House of Ballet," to Schnittke's raucous, oom-pahing "Gogol Suite," is a trifle where some standard-issue ballet situations seem to collide. Marisa Soltis, in her white tutu and tiara, looks like the ballerina on a music box whose spring has been wound a little too tightly, with no distraction able to dent her tidy little

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Ballet Retrospect, program B
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turns. There's a dissonant tango, a takeoff on Swan Lake's little swans, and a group of women in black who arch their backs and prowl like cats. A frisky Salant, in buttercup yellow, looks like she's dancing Bournonville, while Todd Hall menaces Soltis by taking little hops as she's doing her tricky moves.

Due to an injury, "The Last Circus" was replaced by another showing of Mateo's Balanchine-inflected "Schubert Adagio," with Rebecca Arnold's long elegant legs bringing extra passion to her arabesques of engagement and disengagement from Hall, her attentive, and later rejected, partner.