

Mateo opens new 'Worlds' for ballet

Choreographer Jose Mateo is unquestionably a man with a mission. He has spent the past two decades establishing a repertory of more than 40 original works, which he says are very much aimed at "changing how ballet is perceived."

It's not just the audience's per-

Dance

THEODORE BALE

ception that Mateo hopes to change. With his unique mixture of intuition, formal inventiveness and pragmatism, Mateo says he hopes to transform how the dancers in his company view the art form as well.

"For all of its sophistication and refinement," said Mateo, "ballet is lagging way behind the other art forms in terms of advancing into the 21st century. It's barely come out of the 19th century."

Mateo had just finished teaching class in his spacious studios at Old Cambridge Baptist Church before speaking at length with the Herald about his latest program, "From Worlds Within," which opens at the Sanctuary Theatre on April 5 and runs through April 21. Two premieres

will be offered, set respectively to music by Wagner and Debussy, in addition to Mateo's 1991 "Schubert Adagio" and the 2001 "Dark Profiles," which is set to Beethoven's "Grosse Fuge in B Flat."

If you happened to see the latter work when it premiered just a year ago, you know Mateo's ballets are often formally abstract yet permeated with psychological intensity. He says his pieces don't tell a story, but rather suggest a narrative situation that drives the movement.

"As much as we may be focused on the non-narrative aspect of movement, the sequences tell of a development that people will always interpret as a story. So, to that extent, I think it's important to be aware of it, and suggest its direction, if not make it literally explicit. The story aspect is always there, and the dancers are always asking for it," Mateo said.

He describes the scenario of "Dark Profiles," for example, as "the story of an aware but tormented woman whose insistence on the truth of her own reality creates much unintended tension with the object of her lustful desire."

Music, his constant inspiration, often brings to mind some particular member of his company, and raises the question of "whether the movement it suggests can be brought to life with some real level of clarity by one of the dancers," as he put it. Meg Flaherty, who danced in "Dark Profiles" at its premiere, will appear again in the role.

"It is very much personal and about Meg, perhaps, or maybe sides of Meg that may be present and not necessarily prevalent. But present, and in some ways, representing aspects of our own being that might be present in most of us, I'd like to think," Mateo said.

Flaherty, who has been dancing with Mateo's company for 12 years, said that for her, "Dark Profiles" had an elusive beginning.

"When we started working on it, Jose said it had to do with images of dysfunctional relationships," she said. "He wanted to get a feeling of frustration and anger from me in the opening. And after the first performances, I was really struck when people who know me well said 'I've never seen you so angry!'"

"That Irish temper kind of came out, which I usually try to hold back, like my mother told me to do. Technically and from a performance perspective, though, I understand it much better now. There's a big range of emotion within this piece, so I'm hoping that's coming out," said Flaherty.

"I start entirely on an intuitive level," Mateo said, "and then I step back from it and see whether the logic that drove the intuitive choices is apparent, from a more objective perspective. And if it is, then I feel confident that it will work, that it will hold together."

Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre presents "From Worlds Within," April 5-21, the Sanctuary Theatre, 400 Harvard St., Harvard Square, Cambridge. 617-354-7467.