

Dance Review

# When Mateo stretches, this program soars

# Living Arts

THE BOSTON GLOBE SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2005

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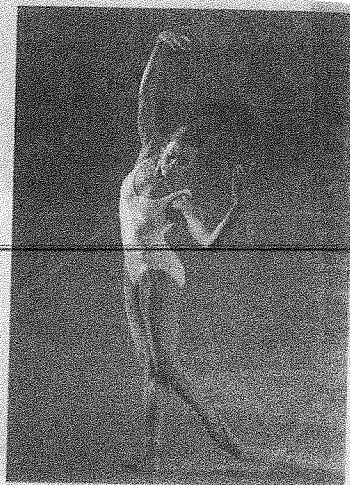
CAMBRIDGE → Jose Mateo's recent trip to Poland has inspired one of the most powerful and heartfelt works in the Cuban-born choreographer's repertoire. "Presage," given its world premiere Thursday night in the season opener of Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre, is set to music by one of Poland's most original composers, Henryk Gorecki. While Mateo calls his new ballet a "humble expression" of his experience with the culture and history of Poland, this abstract work feeds off the gravity and sorrow of Gorecki's luminous score (the first movement of his Symphony No. 3), drawing from Mateo choreography of both sumptuous romantic sweep and searing, intense focus.

Sybil Watkins is the work's regal central figure. Costumed in a simple white leotard, she opens the work from behind a gorgeously lighted portal covered by a diaphanous curtain. With an embrace, she reluctantly parts company with a young man — her husband, perhaps? Her son? Her subsequent solos are somber, introspective, impeccably controlled, and self-contained. There is almost a reverential quality as she moves about the stage. In some of the most strikingly effective moments, she stands completely still, as if marshaling strength and resolve.

As the rumbling double basses of the symphony's opening strains gather momentum, other dancers appear, the corps set mostly in meticulous group patterns. Desiree Reese and Sean Gunter emerge with an exquisitely crafted and beautifully performed duet that unfurls in a liquid flow, as if expelled in one great long breath. Every extension of the legs, every stretch and curve of the arms is luxurious and full-bodied, yet natural. Only an attempted slap, which Gunter casually thwarts with an upraised hand, seems jarringly out of place.

The work's stunning final tableau mirrors the opening; Watkins is once again behind the curtain. But this time, she is on a raised platform halfway to the ceiling. And this time, her young man is draped lifelessly across her lap.

While "Presage" represents the "passion" element of the program,



GREG M. COOPER FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Sybil Watkins is the regal central figure of "Presage."

### Passion/Sublime

Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre  
At: Sanctuary Theatre, Thursday night  
(through Oct. 30). 617-354-7467;  
[www.ballettheatre.org](http://www.ballettheatre.org)

which Mateo has titled "Passion/Sublime," the "sublime" portion is his 1991 "Mozart Concerto." The company's only tutu ballet, this work is quite lovely, representing the choreographer at his most formally classical. However, one of Mateo's strongest contributions to New England's ballet landscape is the creation of a body of work that stretches the boundaries of ballet with a distinctly personal flair, and "Mozart Concerto" — with a few exceptions — is pretty conventional and not particularly memorable.

The ballet features elegant, long-lined phrases of standard ballet lyricism. The corps beautifully fills the intimate Sanctuary Theatre with alluring, unpredictable patterns as dancers exit and enter, group and regroup. Despite some timing discrepancies and a prominent wobble (probably due to first-night jitters), Mateo's company looks well rehearsed and technically solid. Ashley Hubbard and David DuBois were the featured soloists, and they brought the most exciting dancing of the piece in one daring overhead lift and an altered arabesque in which DuBois pressed his partner's raised leg so high it nearly touched her head, her limbs and arched back turning her into a delectably elegant pretzel.