

# BOSTON Herald

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## Mateo's 'Sublime' ballets passionate

By THEODORE BALE

Jose Mateo takes the viewer on an extraordinary journey in his latest program, "Passion/Sublime."

At the start I was thinking about fancy birthday cakes. By the finish, my thoughts had turned to the Christian "Pieta"

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in all its myriad representations. The two ballets shown last night at The Sanctuary Theatre in Harvard Square offer a fascinating glimpse of Mateo's aesthetic concerns during the past 15 years.

"Mozart Concerto" (the "sublime" ballet) hasn't been restaged since its premiere in 1991. It's the epitome of neoclassicism, with a nod or two to Balanchine, in particular his "Divertimento No. 15." Here, Mateo juxtaposes graceful solos against bold unisons from the corps de ballet, all of it very tidy and excruciatingly symmetrical. I like to think of it as one of his "baby blue" ballets — dances set to music from the classical period and very easy on the eye. Often the women resembled a flock of

*Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre in "Passion/Sublime," at the Sanctuary Theatre, Cambridge, last night; runs through Oct. 30.*

well-behaved birds, perfectly spaced, sure of their direction and unambiguously aloof. While it fills in a gap for viewers unfamiliar with Mateo's early repertory, it's the sort of dance he doesn't make any longer.

Several years ago, Mateo entered a mature phase characterized by deeply expressive works simultaneously exploring narrative and musical abstraction. "Escape," from his "Cuban Connection" program, and a powerful ballet set to Beethoven's "Grosse Fuge" demonstrate this style. Add to that "Presage," his latest ballet, set to Gorecki's poignant "Symphony No. 3."

In just a simple white leotard, Sybil Watkins presented challenging adage sequences that prove she is a great artist with exceptional strength and confidence.

Watkins is justifiably the nucleus of "Presage," a sort of mother figure around which all of the action revolves.

Mateo has restricted his movement vocabulary in this lengthy work, suggesting that he can make even stronger statements with fewer elements.