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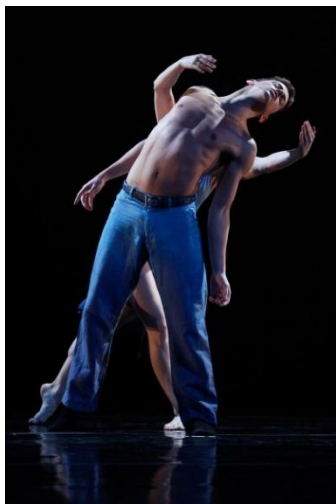
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Parsons Dance @ The Joyce



Tuesday January 10, 2012 - **Parsons Dance** opened their season at **The Joyce** tonight dancing for a sold-out house. The programme included new works by David Parsons (**ROUND MY WORLD**, in Nir Arieli's photo above) and Kate Skarpetowska (**A STRAY'S LULLABYE**) as well as a duet from David's **STEP INTO MY DREAM**, the iconic Parsons hit **CAUGHT**, and the finely-crafted ensemble piece **SWING SHIFT**.

David Parsons put this programme together with his usual savvy for contrasting textures and musical moods; dancing for approximately 75 minutes without intermission was a challenge which the Parsons Dancers took well in stride. I like dance evenings without intermissions: it's good to stay in the atmosphere without the intrusion of the outside world. And it spares us the shuffling and re-settling of the audience after the break. At the opera we think nothing of sitting thru a 90-minute-or-more span of time and if a dance programme is well-constructed - as tonight's was - there's no problem. In fact I think if anything that the sweep of the evening was enhanced by keeping our focus on the stage and not letting external concerns infringe.



Above: Ian Spring in **ROUND MY WORLD**. In this new work, David Parsons uses cello-based music by Zoe Keating to develop dance images radiating from circular form. The dancers arms are gracefully curved in halo-like images; they swirl in pirouetting spirals around one another and meet in circles of community. The boys are shirtless in blue jeans and the girls in simple blue frocks; Ms. Keating's music

has an undercurrent of Appalachian Spring to it, and this - along with the attire of the dancers - gives **ROUND MY WORLD** a grassroots Americana feeling, subtle though it is.



Duetting to Zoe Keating: Maria Elena D'Amario and Steve Vaughn. In the run up to this evening's performance I got to see the Parsons Dancers [in the studio](#) and at a pre-performance photoshoot (where Nir took these pictures) and I felt very much drawn in by their energy, their beauty and their pride of movement. Right from the start, nearly thirty years ago, David Parsons has always had a keen eye for the best dance talent and the most captivating personalities to make his works come alive. The current ensemble is extraordinary.



Lyrical light: Melissa Ullom and Ian Spring in **ROUND MY WORLD**.



Lift: Steve Vaughn



Blonde beauties: Eric Bourne and Sarah Braverman: these two dancers took only a moment to move from the celebratory mood of the finale of **ROUND MY WORLD** to the jazzy feel of the duet from **STEP INTO MY DREAM**. In a work that has both playful and seductive moods, the dancers looked superb.



In a bold mid-evening mood swing, Kate Skarpetowska's darkly evocative **A STRAY'S LULLABY** provided not only powerful opportunities for the dancers but food for thought for the viewer as well. Although the work might have been inspired by the Great Depression, its themes are timely in this current atmosphere of unemployment, lack of opportunity and increasing callousness directed at the "have nots" by those in more fortunate circumstances. The four down-on-their-luck characters in **STRAY'S LULLABY** are (in the above photo) Christina Ilisije, Jason MacDonald, Maria Elena D'Amario and Christopher Bloom.

The work opens with the dancers standing on a street corner with the sounds of traffic (and of life) passing them by. Kenji Bunch arranged and performed the sad songs that make up the score for this shadowy work...but beyond it's gloom there's a ray of hope. The characters are down but they aren't really out, and although at the end of the piece they are still in the same place, they haven't given up.



After a brief ensemble passage, there are two solos: a vivid and harshly demanding one for Christina Ilisije (above) in which this dancer showed fearless physicality and an almost startling depth of commitment...



...and an edgy, space filling solo by Jason MacDonald in which the dancer comes right down to the footlights in a direct connection with the viewer. Both Christina and Jason dug deeply into their techniques and psyches to give us dancing that was powerful and highly personal.



Lyrical but tinged with regret is the duet danced by Christopher Bloom and Maria Elena D'Amario. They manage to communicate but they can't sustain the connection.



Christopher Bloom and Maria Elena D'Amario in **STRAY'S LULLABY**. Christopher is an apprentice with **Parsons Dance**; he's a compact and neat dancer with excellent stage instincts. Maria Elena has a big range as a dancer - she can be a soubrette one minute and a seductress the next - and her acting and dancing add up to a ravishing combination.



**STRAY'S LULLABYE** uses the fusion of Kate Skarpetowska's street-poetry-movement with Kenji Bunch's dusky, smoky backroom music to create a resonant atmosphere; the dancers make it their own. I want to see it again. Above: Christina Ilisije.



Eric Bourne (above) danced **CAUGHT** tonight; however many times I've seen this piece (dozens) it never fails to thrill, and Eric was incredible, not only in the physicality of the non-stop movement but also in those moments when the dancer is suddenly seen standing still in the spotlight. It's as if all the dancing was only an illusion and he's simply been standing there the whole time. Eric looks like a god. Decades ago when I used to go out dancing a lot, my friend Joe from Boston would scan the bare-chested boys sweating it out on the dancefloor around 2:00 AM and exclaim: "Torso City!" I thought of that while watching Eric tonight.



But, moments after his exhausting traversal of **CAUGHT**, Eric was back onstage, cool as an evening breeze, to dance **SWING SHIFT**. Above: Eric with Jason MacDonald.



Kenji Bunch provides the music, its free-flowing style mirrored in the Parsons choreography, for **SWING SHIFT**. The dancers are clad in skirt-like long, loose-fitted trousers which give an added swirl to the movement.



In the finale, Melissa Ullom and Steve Vaughn (above) enter into a friendly pirouette contest. From day one, David Parsons has always peopled his Company with fantastic dancers. Melissa and Steve continue that tradition: their dancing is distinctive, generous and vividly responsive to the music.



Ian Spring - a guy with a million-dollar smile - and Sarah Braverman whisk thru a duet passage in **SWING SHIFT**. Sarah's solo near the end of this piece was a high-point in an evening of remarkable dance.



Above: Sarah Braverman and Jason MacDonald in **SWING SHIFT**.

**The Joyce** was packed with ardent Parsonites, thoroughly absorbed in the dance and expressing their approval with bursts of applause all evening long and a sustained ovation at the end. **Parsons Dance** continue their season at **The Joyce** thru January 22nd. Tickets [here](#).

Following their New York City season, **Parsons Dance** will embark on a 6-week European tour.

All photos by [Nir Arieli](#) from a pre-performance photoshoot. My thanks to David Parsons, his associate artistic director Elizabeth Koeppen and publicist Michelle Brandon Tabnick for their hospitality!

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