

Counting Carats

New York City Ballet
New York State Theater
Through June 29

BY DEBORAH JOWITT

New York City Ballet's Diamond Project is a smaller, homier affair than it was in 1994: only six choreographers presenting new ballets, all but one former or current company members, and that one, Kevin O'Day, with a track record of four NYCB commissions. The suspense: which will play Saratoga this summer, which enter the repertory?

George Balanchine modestly likened making ballets to making omelettes. So here are these guys in his kitchen, using his skillsets and eggs from his chicken coop. Is this intimidating or empowering? Probably a little of both.

Christopher d'Amboise shakes a lot of with-it spices into the mix. Hmm, ancho chiles. . . . And why not a little fresh lemongrass from the green market? The result, *Circle of Fifths*, is a piquant oddity, with a few downright weird touches (like people jumping straight up, their feet turned out and flexed—you want to say "Boing! Boing!"). The choreography abounds in provocative images: the brilliant and versatile Peter Boal recoiling as if the raised legs of four women in arabesque were turnstiles not going his way, or lying face down on the floor while Wendy Whelan and Albert Evans (two other cutting-edge dancers) engage in a slow, tense duet. D'Amboise honors the constant pulse of Philip Glass's *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* by having Boal begin alone in space, pulsing. Yet, except for the moment Evans runs his face down Whelan's leg, the ballet features jerky movement seldom, except in passages of running, acknowledging the fluid current of Glass's music. At one point, the corps's maneuvers suggest an orderly battle of windup toys.

Miriam Mahdavi's *Urban Dances* is a very nice ballet, and I don't mean that to sound like a veiled insult. In fact, I'd like to see it again, whereas the arbitrary novelties in d'Amboise's more arresting work might pall after repeated viewings. Working to a commissioned score by Richard Danielpour, Mahdavi ignores some of its large musical changes, but responds to its shifts of mood. A quick, brash duet for Miranda Weese and Jock Soto and a fine, scampy, kick-up-your-heels trio for Peter Hansen, Jennie Somogyi, and Edward Liang establish a playful tone. But there are lightly shadowed moments in the comings and goings of these people and 14 others—visions of couples like the "lovers in innocence" in Antony Tudor's *Pillar of Fire*.

Carry the omelette metaphor a bit further (scallions and a touch of basil for Mahdavi's, perhaps), and you have to wonder how Christopher Wheeldon's *Slavonic Dances* (Dvořák) ever got cooked: drop in a bit of paprika, taste again, what about some carrots? Wheeldon, a terrifically gifted young British choreographer currently dancing in NYCB's corps de ballet, has concocted a work so bursting with small dollops of juicy ingredients that you want to yell, "Hold it a second so we can all take a breath." Wheeldon aims to keep the stage a busy place. So he reintroduces this bit, turns that one inside out, layers

complicated actions, hustles people onstage for a phrase or two, and then sweeps them off. Practically every change in the quality of the music brings on new personnel, new configura-

the music and projected slides: Josef Sudek's lovely photographs of Prague (the slides—high on the backdrop—don't all work, and Mark Stanley's lighting seems hobbled by them). It's a pleasure to see two corps women partnered by the star men. Rachel Rutherford has a lovely clear style, restrained

dangerously with a Balanchinian blend of geometric cool and erotic mystery. Stanley's white glare of light, 16 women in red bathing suits (by Gary Lisz), and eight men in brown Ts and black tights turn the stage into a parade ground. La Fosse displays his troops in sharp-edged moves set in immaculately symmetrical



Brash buddies: Jock Soto and Miranda Weese in Miriam Mahdavi's *Urban Dances*

rations. In a wink at tradition, four women, hands holding one another's elbows overhead, flash us the cygnets of *Swan Lake*; in a distinctly atypical NYCB moment, the two leading men, Boal and Soto, boisterously partner Alexander Iziliaev and Benjamin Millepied.

Wearing attractive dark outfits by Angela Kostitzky, the dancers might be guests at an ebullient celebration whose familiar Slavic touches (hands behind heads, heel-and-toe events, running chains) pick up atmosphere from

yet bold in space. Monique Meunier, after a rocky start in the company, has come into her own, and Wheeldon's "alla zingarese" duet for her and Soto shows off her lusciousness. Like Suzanne Farrell in her heyday (catch her on PBS Wednesday at 9), Meunier teases you with the tension between control and abandon. When those legs fly up, you expect the skies to open.

In *Concerto in Five Movements*, to Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 5 in G, the accomplished Robert La Fosse plays

formations. Video-game Petipa. Evans and Weese dance cleverly; the corps, in slow drill, closes in and opens out. Tom Gold leads the men in frisky jumps; lines of women flank them. Drama develops when the corps separates Whelan and Soto and the men bear her away; she returns for a last clinch, then bourrées backward, ghostly. *Swan Lake* in cyberspace. Actually, in context, the duet is a science-fiction moment: two androids stare at each other. "Was that a tear I saw, Galacta?"

Colored Fungi

At Pilobolus, a
Minority Majority

BY THOMAS
DEFRANTZ

The shape-shifting acrobats of Pilobolus have morphed into the Joyce for their annual, inter-racial long season sporting a new, interracial look: three of the six dancers are African American, and another claims Filipino ancestry. "We're an equal opportunity employer," boasts Jonathan Wolken, one of the company's four white artistic directors. "It doesn't matter if they're Asian, black, white, or not so white. But this is the first time we've had sooooo much . . . melanin. It makes us all want to go out in the sun."

Pilobolus works collaboratively, so hiring diverse dancers allows African and Asian diaspora moves to filter firsthand into the mix. Happily, dancers get paid program credit alongside choreographers. Among new work is a solo for Tamecia McCloud—the first

black woman ever to join the ensemble—created with honcho Alison Chase. "It's a demanding thing, with a lot of jumping," McCloud told me. "Alison said, 'You have certain traits in your movement style that I want to work with.' It feels good because our energies clicked and the improv process was positive."

Changing the look of the company is not without consequence in the race-conscious '90s. *Alraune*, an abstract 1975 work inspired by the mandrake plant, gained new meaning last year when Trebien Pollard, a black man,

performed the duet with white Rebecca Jung. Says Pollard, "I got paranoid about this choking gesture at the end of the dance. It had more anger in it, and I choked her a little hard. I had been watching the O.J. trials on TV. Well, you know. . . ."

Pollard and Haitian-born Gaspard Louis now essay the roles of the suitors in *Untitled*, the lusciously layered Pilobolus fantasy set in the antebellum South, spinning the tale of elongating women into the realm of '90s irony. According to Wolken, the company's current vibe will play best to those in the audience who notice the difference: "Someone who has sufficient age to understand the classic and sufficient cool to understand the hip." Add: sufficient smarts to dig the group's pigmentation.

DA
NCE

Endurance Test

Long before mosh pits, dancing displayed decorum and propriety, as the New York Baroque Dance Company demonstrated in its 20th-anniversary concert at Alice Tully Hall June 12. (Lincoln Center awarded NYBDC a Community Arts Project subsidy to return to Tully, the venue of their 1977 New York debut.) Their opulent, authentic costumes—the women corseted, the men in neck ruffs—are designed to restrict rather than release motion.

On the plate of dance performance today, baroque dance is the green vegetable, more about historical nourishment than sensory titillation. *Dances of the Court* suggests royals mingling at a party, checking out potential partners, basking in their gaze. Accompanied by Concert Royal, dancers communicate with flicking wrists and twitching ankles.

In Guillaume Louis Pecour's 1700 *Passacaille d'Armide*, Catherine Turocy, who both restores and performs these works, shifts from pensive, tempestuous moods with subtle mastery of her hands and feet, her face hidden behind a delicate mask. The second half of the program strays from courtly entertainments: Ballet Tech Kids Dance dig into commedia dell'arte characters. Pint-size Emmanuel Robinson makes an irresistible Pierrot perplexed by a beautiful lady/ugly maid. Edgar Peterson's Three-Legged Dancer skillfully steers clear of tangled appendages. P.D.O. Bach jazzes Turocy's *L'apremidi d'un Cyclope*, a spoof of Nijinsky's risqué ballet: Patricia Beaman plays a Wonder Woman—Isadora Duncan nymph, with a gold headband and free-spirited leaps. Turocy's *Pygmalion* revisits an *acte de ballet* from 1748 wherein dance rewards great art. As Amour, Christine Brandes wears wings on her back, but there's nothing wispy in her voice. Strong singers join talented dancers to re-create Rameau's vision.

A dance company making it to a third decade merits kudos: Turocy has directed the troupe since its 1976 inception; Suzanne Konowitz has served as general manager for 10 years.

—KATE MATTINGLY