

Even at its most rousing and entertaining, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has always been attuned to social issues. During its winter season at City Center, it seemed only appropriate that, given the tumultuous political climate in the US, its new productions, no matter when they were choreographed, would be scrutinised for possible topicality.

Three novelties were presented in a triple bill on December 22. *Deep*, Mauro Bigonzetti's world premiere to music by Ibeyi, was a suite of torrid duets with immediate appeal. *Walking Mad*, which Johan Inger created back in 2001, was more difficult to fathom in its Ailey premiere. The cast included nine dancers and a large moving wall that advanced and receded and opened and closed, revealing and hiding people, often to comic effect, save for one frightening moment when it rolled relentlessly forward like a juggernaut about to crush a defenseless mortal. Inger set his piece to Ravel's *Bolero*, plus Arvo Pärt's *Für Aline*, which had little effect because it followed the Ravel. Yet because most of the choreography was undifferentiated dithering, there was no steady building to a choreographic climax that could match Ravel's music.

Hope Boykin was idealistic in her new, oddly titled, *r-Evolution, Dream*, to a collage of music by Ali Jackson and recorded recitations from writers ranging from Shakespeare

Three very different styles of dance were on view in the Big Apple during December



Above: Dancers of Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo in the Pas de Six from Napoli.

and Isaac Watts, to James Weldon Johnson. A large cast of Ailey dancers was augmented by young people from its second company, Ailey II. All engaged in struggles and attempts at reconciliation until Matthew Rushing came forward like a prophet guiding them. Their efforts, though well-intentioned, looked strangely pallid.

That might also be said of Kyle Abraham's new *Untitled America*, which shared a triple bill with the Inger and the Bigonzetti on December 30. The earnest work concerned the plight of prisoners and, like the Boykin, was accompanied by a collage of music and texts, in this case statements by prisoners. Drably clad dancers trudged, occasionally fell to the floor, and often stood with their hands held tightly behind them, as if they were shackled. Nothing had real impact. There was little sense of locale, or even of confinement, and without the recitations it might have been hard to know the dance depicted prisoners. Abraham may have wished to avoid

crude literalism; instead, he was much too vague.

Few would associate Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo (the Trocks) with militant protest, although some commentators have called this all-male troupe radical for defying conventions of balletic gender. In recent years the dancers' increased expertise has made it possible to regard their offerings as serious efforts, and not merely as parodies. During its winter season at the Joyce Theater, seriousness triumphed over spoofing in a new production, by Raffaele Morra and Karina Elver, of the Pas de Six from Bournonville's *Napoli*. There were little jokes, often involving the disparities in height between the cast's four tall "ballerinas" and two shorter "cavaliers", but what made the production noteworthy was its footwork and bounce, its genuine Bournonville brio.

On December 13, *Napoli* was danced on a programme that also included *Raymonda's Wedding*. These Petipa divertissements were stylistically admirable too, with few farcical exaggerations. In fact, one of the production's subtle witticisms was a balletic in-joke. Dancers and their coaches have long argued whether the handclap gestures in the ballerina variation should be audible as well as visual. The Trocks left no doubt about their opinion: not just the debated variation, but solo after solo in its production crackled with claps; these ballerinas refused to shut up.

Earlier in December at the Joyce, the Lucinda Childs Dance Company presented a choreographic retrospective that included *Lucinda Childs: A Portrait (1963-2016)*, an anthology of works created over the decades. Of the choreographers who emerged from the experimental Judson Dance Theater of the 1960s, Childs and Trisha Brown became known for their love of repetition, but whereas Brown's repetitions were often hearty, this programme revealed how Childs was fastidious in her use of precise walks, strides, skips, and turns. Her dancers' carriage was almost always erect, and this insistent uprightness made some viewers consider Childs excessively puritanical in her aesthetic. If one grows accustomed to her rigorous patterning, however, one can see that her cool dances burn with the fire of pure form. ■