

DANCE

Review: The Trocks Delight With Fabulous Charm

By ALASTAIR MACAULAY DEC. 15, 2016

Ballet is a completely absurd art — and we love it to pieces: that’s what Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo proclaims with every move. The divas and cavaliers of this all-male troupe are — as they present themselves to us in performance — fabulously stupid, artificial, hammy, clichéd, superficial, dated, monstrous. But they simply adore dancing and their audiences, even more than they love makeup and costumes. So, while you laugh at their demented antics, you find yourself watching them with a special tenderness. You’re on their side.

The absurdity and the adorability are perfectly fused in the latest addition to the Trockadero repertory, the pas de six from August Bournonville’s “Napoli” (1842). This production of a dance, made for four women and two men, casts two of its tiniest members as the men, and, despite their male attire, renders them somewhat more feminine in manners and makeup than their four ballerina companions. This is immediately funny, and some of the consequent jokes are funnier: When the men take turns lifting the women, the fourth and largest ballerina solves the imbalance by lifting him instead.

But both the women and the men love Bournonville’s dances and take wonderful trouble about detailed points of style. There are numerous passages here that aren’t comic — they’re simply joyous. And to watch divas and divos in bliss delights the audience. And then along comes an assortment of other jokes. When one ballerina is doing rather too well in a long solo variation, another one tries — unsuccessfully — to trip her. As yet another ballerina pauses on flat feet to prepare for a multiple pirouette, her features show an expression of goggle-eyed

terror: It lasts less than a second, the pirouette goes just fine, and she sweetly resumes the marvelously long, complex phrases of her dance.

The Trocks (as the dance world knows them) are dancing out the old year with a three-week season at the Joyce Theater; there are two programs. Program A was announced as a quadruple bill, but was rendered quintuple at short notice by the addition of “The Dying Swan,” a staple of Trocks repertory, in which the ballerina’s tutu molts enough feathers to stuff pillows. She (Maria Paranova) finds time to wave at her audience, but, in her own Trockish way, she takes acting — her idea of acting — very seriously: She executes industrial quantities of swannishness, and gorges herself on the swan’s death throes.

“The Dying Swan” (Saint-Saëns music) seldom shares a program with “Le Lac des Cygnes (Swan Lake, Act II)” (Tchaikovsky music). But here both occur. It’s in “Swan Lake” that I get most bewildered about which sex these performers really are. Prince Siegfried (Vladimir Legupski) and his confidant Benno (Pepe Dufka) have such splendid maquillage. I love the prince’s hairpin, too; and cherish the long sequence when he slowly crosses the stage, pointing his legs and feet elaborately, stretching them straight from the hips like spears — to silence, while nothing else happens. The swans, meanwhile, several of whom have hairy chests visible above their tutus, throw themselves into their dances and their swan behavior with enchanting aggression.

As the Swan Queen, Yakatarina Verbosovich is often more absurd than anyone, but no less often she is an outstandingly good dancer. Those quivering petits battements serrés at the end of the adagio, in which the ballerina beats one foot rapidly beside her ankle, like the rapid fluttering of a wingtip, surpass those by quite a number of “real” ballerinas. The amalgam of ballerina finesse and daft diva antics is brilliant, unsettling, riveting — the epitome of Trocks style.

“Patterns in Space” (“choreography after Merce Cunningham”) — the title is a play on Cunningham’s 1986 “Points in Space” — goes straight for all that’s nuttiest about the separation of dance and music in the Cunningham ethos. Lariska Dumbchenko and Yuri Smirnov are the musicians, seated on one side of the stage, and they’re far more solemn than any Cunningham musician ever was, gloriously intense in their percussion effects and farmyard noises.

The program ends with “Raymonda’s Wedding,” a plotless divertissement that nonetheless brilliantly evokes the inexplicable silly story of Marius Petipa’s 1898 ballet. The White Lady (Ida Nevasayneva) presides graciously over the nuptial celebrations, which, though occurring in Provence, are danced in Hungarian style. The Trocks adopt intensely Hungarian dance behavior (every hand-clapping, head-shaking czardas mannerism) when they remember. Petipa left out fouetté turns, so they rectify that omission; and their joy is infectious.

The best-timed joke of the whole evening comes when Raymonda’s husband, Jean de Brienne (Boris Mudko), runs, midexit, straight into a wing and falls flat. Never fear: He’s soon up and dancing. Fire, flood, illness, trauma — nothing could stop Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo from dancing, and all for you, you, you.

Correction: December 15, 2016

An earlier version of this review misidentified the Swan Queen ballerina in the Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo program. It was Yakatarina Verbosovich, not Alla Snizova.

Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo

Through Dec. 31 at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, Manhattan; 212-242-0800, joyce.org.

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