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REVIEWS (Cont'd from page 42)

ultory high kicks and fouettés. When a rodeo couple made a coy entrance, trailed by two feathered friends, I steeled myself for the Bluebird pas de deux. As is turned out, they were mockingbirds, the Texas state bird.

Texas On Point, like *Prodigal Son* (in *Ragtime*) in the Houston Ballet repertory, is a new breed of ballet that I'm seeing more often. Influenced by the movies or perhaps the advertising industry, these ballets click by in a sequence of images that are strong on pictorial effect but empty of movement. They are Viewmaster ballets, the product of slight choreographic talent wed to big budgets. Texas seems to specialize in them.

The remainder of the Dallas Ballet program, including a Peter Anastos ballet and John Cranko's *Jeu de Cartes*, revealed a talented but uncertain company. The corps seemed timid about inhabiting space, which undercut *Jeu de Cartes*, a stylish parade of manners in the guise of a poker game. The male Hearts lacked the authority to carve out space with their bodybuilder poses, and the aristocratic Spades, with their rococo flourishes, seemed too tentative. But Laura Flagg, as the puppydog-eared 2 of Diamonds, demonstrated her comic gifts as she doggedly latched herself onto the back of a deckmate, scrambling to keep up with the shuffling game.

Flagg is the brightest face in this company, a tiny dancer who seems radiantly alive in any role, whether she's extending her line lyrically or using her size to comic effect. With her superb timing and expressiveness she reminds me of Christine Sarry. Another important addition to the Dallas company is Jennifer Holmes, formerly of Houston Ballet. A regal ballerina, Holmes was sorely underused in this program.

The Anastos ballet, *Table Manners*, set to a pieced-together Handel score, was commissioned by Dallas Ballet for this gala. One viewing left me puzzled. Apparently a parody of obscure psychological ballets, *Table Manners* consisted mostly of dark looks and skipping around. I caught a few dance in-jokes, including what may have been a reference to Pilobolus as gossiping ballerinas were carried on chair seats fashioned from their partners' arms. But I'm not sure what the entire exercise amounted to. In parodying obscurity, it helps to be obvious now and then.

I was far more entertained and intellectually challenged by David Gordon's *Just Passin' Through*, commissioned by the **Sharir Dance Company** for its debut in Austin on March 26. An outgrowth of the American Deaf Dance Company directed by Yacov Sharir, this dozen-member troupe promises to provide quality contemporary dance for Austin. Gordon's work was a patterning and repatterning of space, with dancers manipulating each other, relaying gestures, and walking in and out of coalescing formations. I liked the way the dance suggested that pedestrian movement occasionally assumes ritual forms, how we sometimes organize ourselves into Easter parades or bridal marches.

Gordon used a tape of Glenn Miller's swing tune "In the Mood" with an overlay of rehearsal chatter. As the dancers executed intricate walking patterns, we could hear strains of the Miller music. There was one hilarious section of miscues accompanied

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by a chicken-clucking rendition of the tune.

The Gordon work was the happiest moment of the Sharir company debut. The other works on the program were too similar in tone and style, too darkly intellectualized. Sharir's own *Collage*, to a Luciano Berio score, was a brooding work with a cathedral atmosphere. Ten dancers moved in characteristic Sharir fashion, with quick changes of position and focus, bursts of large-scale unison movement, and always a jogger's sort of high-energy readiness. The female dancers wore one soft shoe and one pointe shoe, the latter used for perching and propulsion. Sharir indicated in a program note that the work was built on several complex floor patterns, but I was unable to decipher them on stage. *Collage* looked unfocused, but it was a model of organization compared with the works performed on the same program by the **Margaret Jenkins Dance Company** from San Francisco.

Jenkins's laundry-flop, spin-dry brand of choreography was swallowed by the Performing Arts Center stage. Both her *Harp* and the more dramatic *Versions by Turns* are constructed on mellow shifts of weight and small-scale gestures performed by a group of isolated individuals who only occasionally connect. My eye had nowhere to focus, no way to glom onto the scattered, spongy bodies that noodled around on their own. The energy level seemed too low, the spatial appetite too faint, for a big proscenium-arch stage.

For sheer eye pleasure (plus heart, soul, and mind), George Balanchine's *Serenade* is a blue-chip addition to the **Houston Ballet** repertoire. Performed in the March 10-13 series at Jones Hall, the ballet was one half of a program completed by Jiri Kylian's *Symphony in D*, with three pas de deux in between.

The Houston Ballet women approached *Serenade* studiously, with the touching concentration of schoolgirls straining for exactness in every posture and rhythmic beat. What I missed in their conscientious approach was the magical undertow of the ballet, its essence of perfume. Of the dancers, Jeanne Doornbos seemed most at home in the work, combining vivacity with restraint and womanly ease.

The Kylian work, choreographed to excerpts from two Haydn symphonies, is a lighthearted romp in the Peter Anastos vein, but dancier. Visual puns abound, including a ballerina who fastens herself to her partner's ankles, and a line of men who, one by one, spin in the air, down to the last man who merely shrugs and twirls his finger. The Houston dancers wear this work well. Artistic director Ben Stevenson is molding this company into a cohesive style that is one part British academicism, one part Broadway sell, and maybe a wee part Texan in its expansiveness and warmth.

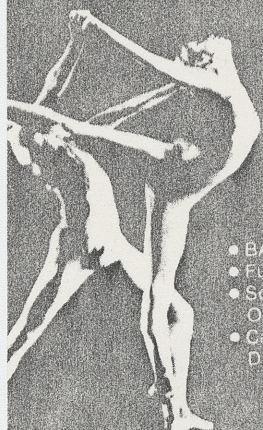
Stevenson's own *Vivaldi Pas de Deux* for Janie Parker and Li Cunxin is typical of his choreography. Fussy, awash in sentiment, and loaded with technical gadgetry, his dances seem to be more about the way they look than about the way they move. Cunxin manipulates the supple Parker through a tricky duet that resembles, at times, an ice-skating routine. Set to the Winter section of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, the duet is windswept-romantic. Everything must have its

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