

Review: Schenectady's *Daily Gazette*

Music, movement become one with Barton's ensemble

Saturday, March 20, 2010

By: Wendy Liberatore, Gazette Reporter

ALBANY — When dance lovers bemoan the dearth of choreographic talent, remember to point to Aszure Barton. This Canadian dance creator, seen with her ensemble on Saturday night at The Egg, is one to celebrate. Her dances are quirky, eye-catching and even when they seem nonsensical, are thoroughly engaging.

Barton draws from a wellspring of movement. Though planted in contemporary dance, she dabbles in ballet, modern, folk, pop and hip-hop. She combines them with an equally wide range of music, from Les Yeux Noir and Ljova and the Kontraband to Andy Williams and Paul Simon.

Her athletic and dramatic dancers — 10 including herself — enhance the eclectic mix by owning the movement so completely that it appears that they are orchestrating the music as they dance. The music and movement are one. Audiences, as a consequence, surrender.

Aszure Barton and Artists presented two works at The Egg: “Busk,” a dark ironic homage to street performers, and “Blue Soup,” a medley of Barton creations.

While both were enjoyable, “Busk” was a fully realized work that demonstrated Barton’s growing maturity and deftness as a choreographer. In the piece, she captured the various characters who make their living on the streets — mimes, contortionists, acrobats, musicians and prostitutes. With their hands out, literally, they ply their trades. While it seems they are manipulating the audience (certainly, those at The Egg were intrigued), the piece implied that these artists were the ones manipulated, mainly by society. They were puppets in an indifferent world, which forced them to earn a dollar any way they can.

Much of the movement was rooted in gesture — a wave, a bow, a slap and a fall. They smiled and laughed. But Barton made her menacing point as the dancers piled onto each other, looking like a mass of discarded rags.

While the theme was serious, Barton injected just enough humor to keep it from being a drag. She also showed her adroitness at moving dancers on and off the stage. Each new scene was so smoothly sliced that transitions were invisible. This is a choreographer who understands stagecraft.

“Blue Soup” was lighter fare. The piece melded past Barton creations, thus the title. And while one would expect many of the ingredients to be incompatible, they weren’t. Every vignette was another tasty nugget, even though it made no logical sense.

She tied it together by dressing everyone in azure-colored suits. Her style was clearly stated in each segment. It was so freewheeling and organic, the step felt improvised. Heads and arms were liquid while legs kicked sharply. Backs were floppy, dancers bent forward and back before they ended splayed on the floor. Yet, there was also amazing control in the solo sections where dancers did everything with grace and ease, including headstands.

All was lit ingeniously, heightening the mystery and interest in both dances.

So if you are seeking a new dance company to fall in love with, Aszure Barton and Artists just might be the one.