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Dance Review | Keigwin & Company

POP SENSIBILITIES, ALONG WITH SOME QUIRKY FLAIR

By CLAUDIA LA ROCCO



Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

It's easy to imagine Larry Keigwin choreographing a Beyoncé video, even if you didn't know he got his start as a backup dancer on Club MTV. Please don't mistake that for faint praise (who doesn't love her "Single Ladies"?), only a nod to this witty stylist's pop sensibilities.

In the meantime Mr. Keigwin is fast making inroads on the concert dance circuit. On Tuesday night Keigwin & Company, formed in 2003, had its first solo week at the Joyce Theater, performing repertory works and a premiere before a full, enthusiastic house.

The new work, "Bird Watching," shows Mr. Keigwin as engaged as ever in people watching.

Preening and plumage aren't just for the birds, and here five dancers, dressed in Fritz Masten's glittery black-and-white costumes (figure skating comes to mind), strut and swoop to Haydn's Symphony No. 6 in D.

The chandelier and cream-colored backdrop signal grandeur, as does Burke Wilmore's buttery lighting. But these characters are surely nouveau riche, with their hip-jutting attitude and flashy jewels. In one of the most striking motifs they rapidly fan their ring-bearing hands in front of their faces, simultaneously coy and attention grabbing.

Mr. Keigwin's mix of kinetic street energy and academic technique is always pleasing (as is his nonchalant inclusion of homosexuality, at a time when too much dance remains closeted onstage; a section in another work, "Mattress Suite," is cheekily titled "Straight Duet"). But "Bird Watching" feels a bit dutiful to me, especially when followed by "Runaway" (2008), a nasty-edged world of mannequins and suits set to Jonathan Melville Pratt's propulsive "Thirteen."

Originally a Juilliard School commission for 25 students, "Runaway" has been restaged for 16 dancers, who rocket across the stage and up and down the aisles in Mr. Masten's 1960s-ish costumes: black suits with pencil ties for the men and bright, modish mini dresses for the women, who also sport huge, teased-out wigs.

Aloof and aggressive, the dancers push and pull against one another, one minute throwing come hither looks over their shoulders, the next barely bothering to catch their partners before disinterestedly letting them slide to the floor. Their speed delights, as does the sheer amount of physical information Mr. Keigwin packs

into any given phrase. He is adept at creating and then disrupting rapidly shifting spatial patterns, so that the eye is engaged on both the macro and micro levels.

Works like "Runaway" or "Caffeinated" (2007) show how well Mr. Keigwin has been watching his older modern-dance colleagues, as well as the everyday behavior that inspires so many of his themes. He sometimes lays these themes on rather too thickly. All of the "Caffeinated" dancers wield paper coffee cups, mugging as they hurriedly slice and dice the stage to a Philip Glass score. You're caffeinated, we get it.

Still, it's amusing when Nicole Wolcott, a founding company member, shows us just how brittle her plastered-on smile is. And it's a treat simply to see her and Mr. Keigwin himself dancing, in "Caffeinated" and the oft-performed "Mattress Suite." You have to have physical chops to be in this troupe, but these two have a particularly quirky flair.

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