

At Touhill, Houston Ballet upholds its fine reputation

At Touhill, Houston Ballet upholds its fine reputation

BY CALVIN WILSON • calvinwilson@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8346
www.STLtoday.com | No Comments Posted | Posted: Sunday, October 10, 2010 3:26 pm



Amitava Sarkar Houston Ballet in "Falling," with James Gotesky, Peter Franc and artists of Houston Ballet

Acclaimed not only as an outstanding regional dance company but also as one of international importance, the Houston Ballet raises expectations wherever it performs. On Saturday evening at the Blanche M. Touhill Performing Arts Center, the company upheld its reputation in a program presented by Dance St. Louis that attracted 775 people.

Set to music by Igor Stravinsky, iconic choreographer George Balanchine's "Apollo," staged by Victoria Simon, involves the mythical god and his schooling in the arts from three muses. The dreamy, almost hypnotic piece seemed an odd choice to start off the evening. But as the lute-wielding Apollo, Connor Walsh was a graceful and commanding presence.

"Falling," choreographed by Houston Ballet artistic director Stanton Welch and set to music by Mozart, had an imaginative liveliness that was altogether delightful. The piece began with a series of couples zooming across the stage, exuberance personified. As

"Falling" evolved, the 10 dancers took on various configurations in the dance equivalent of a kaleidoscope. Seldom has the sheer poetry of the art form been so vividly expressed.

Christopher Bruce, the company's associate choreographer, set his piece "Hush" to music from the 1992 album of the same name on which jazz vocalist Bobby McFerrin and classical cellist Yo-Yo Ma collaborated.

Fanciful and folksy, the piece revolved around a family of circus performers and might have reminded some dancegoers of the films of Federico Fellini. "Hush" exuded a warmth and sincerity that was perfectly complemented by the catchy McFerrin/Ma score. While spotlighting the more intimate aspects of circus life, the piece also eloquently spoke to the universality of the family experience.

Throughout the evening, moments of beauty vied for attention with displays of technical expertise that weren't quite as emotionally engaging as they were clearly meant to be - particularly in the case of "Apollo." But to quote the legendary jazz saxophonist Ornette Coleman, beauty is a rare thing.