

# Fine start for new company

By Allan Ulrich

If the objective of a dance company were merely to ingratiate itself, SFDanceworks, which opened its inaugural season Thursday, June 23, at ODC Theater, would tower over the competition. Artistic Director James Sofranko (a veteran soloist of the San Francisco Ballet) has recruited a sextet of dancers who are ballet trained and ballet experienced.

Sofranko wants to expand that base and aerate the classical conventions without traducing them, much like Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, whence he borrowed the most engaging work on this weekend's program, Alejandro Cerrudo's raffish "Lickety Split" (2006), set to Devendra Banhart's engaging pop score.

This series of fractured romances does an enormous amount in its 16 minutes. The dancers pose in silhouette in defiance of classical rigor, returning to establish transitory partners. Partnering is eccentric, as a man reaches for a woman's ankle. The antic *SFDanceworks continues on E3*



Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

**Ben Needham-Wood and Anne Zivolich-Adams dance "Lickety Split" in SFDanceworks' first program.**

## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

## A fine start for Sofrankos' new company

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spirit makes for a satisfying pop ballet.

The company included Dana Genshaft (retired from San Francisco Ballet), Garrett Anderson, Anne Zivolich-Adams (formerly of ODC Dance), Ben Needham-Wood, Amber Neumann and Tobin Del Cuore, who also rehearsed the piece.

Sofranko was astute to revive the duet from Lar Lubovitch's "Concerto Six Twenty-Two" during Pride Week. Premiered at the height of the AIDS epidemic, the work has slipped away in recent years, though the male duet, set to the slow movement of the Mozart Clarinet Concerto, affirms the endurance of the male bond.

The duo, garbed in angelic white, walk serenely toward us. Shoulders nuzzle, hands touch, arms trace bonds in air. One man lifts the other, and the descent is complicated. At the end, the pair slip away as smoothly as they arrive.

The experience of "Concerto Six Twenty-Two" yields an odd sensation: You feel that the work is manipulative (Mozart has a lot to do with it), yet you allow yourself to be manipulated. There have been more technically confident performances than this one by Anderson and Del Cuore, but none more sincere.

It was the opening part of the evening with three premieres that made me wonder whether Sofranko has yet firmed up his artistic priorities for SFDanceworks. "Joe & Ida," a co-premiere with Grand Rapids Ballet, finds choreographer Penny Saunders moving from a solo German folk song to a collage score that includes bits of Michael Nyman and Thomas Adès and standard pop stuff. Unisons (with Kendall Teague joining the group) segue into emotional tugs of war. Saunders moves her dancers deftly, but an air of cuteness prevails.

Cuteness also dominates Sofranko's "Z," a love letter to Zivolich-Adams' dexterity in bourréing across the stage and tapping in place to a Bob



Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

**Anne Zivolich-Adams, Garrett Anderson, Dana Genshaft, Ben Needham-Wood, Amber Neumann, Kendall Teague of SFDanceworks.**

**SFDanceworks:** Dances by Sofranko, Genshaft, Saunders, Cerrudo and Lubovitch. Through 8 p.m. Saturday, June 25. \$20-\$45. ODC Theater, 3153 17th St., S.F. [www.odcdance.org/tickets](http://www.odcdance.org/tickets). (415) 863-9834.

📺 To see SF Danceworks in rehearsal, go to <https://vimeo.com/170867778>

Crosby jazz score. Genshaft's "Portrait," a solo theater piece that cast Neumann as George Sand, offered more promise, but projecting film on the floor is a poor idea in ODC Theater, where much simply can't be seen.

Still, Sofranko's notion of contemporary classicism can fill an aesthetic need in this community. I await season two.

*Allan Ulrich is The San Francisco Chronicle's dance correspondent.*



Neumann of SFDanceworks in "Portrait," part of the new troupe's first program.