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JESSICA CHRISTIAN/S.F. EXAMINER



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SFDanceworks smoothly steps into second season

By Leslie Katz
S.F. Examiner Staff Writer

Judging by its second season program, SFDanceworks is nicely fulfilling its mission to look forward to the future, but not ignore the past.

The troupe founded by San Francisco Ballet soloist James Sofranko — who graciously thanked Thursday's sold-out opening night crowd at ODC Theater for "coming back" — presented six engaging works showcasing graceful and strong professionals.

With one world premiere and four pieces made in 2012 or after, the focus was on the contemporary.

Yet the evening's most emotional, heartfelt and beautiful dance was 1942's "Chaconne" by pioneering Mexican choreographer José Limón (1908-1972), a solo he created for himself set to music by Bach.

Former San Francisco Ballet principal dancer Pascal Molat, who retired from performing with that company last year, and solo violinist René Mandel did the work proud; it was spellbinding and breathtaking from its deliberate, pointed, sculptural opening to its thrilling, twirling conclusion.

Supplying a contrasting study in conflict and angst were three newer dances for groups.

Much of James Graham's relentlessly athletic world premiere, "Two Dimes and a Nickel," was performed



COURTESY ALEXANDER RENEFF-OLSON

SFDanceworks' second season program featured the company in "Soir Bleu."

REVIEW: SFDanceworks

Where: ODC Theater, 3153 17th St., S.F.

When: 8 p.m. June 23, 2 and 8 p.m. June 25

Ticket: \$20 to \$50 **Contact:** (415) 863-9834, www.odc.dance

with no musical accompaniment, accentuating the dancers' intense breathing, staged moaning and the piece's innate drama.

Wearing shorts, shirts and ankle socks, the trio — Kendall Teague, Dana Genshaft and Garrett Anderson

(the latter two from San Francisco Ballet) — was in constant state of jerky, lunging motion.

At the start, they lie on their stomachs on the floor, in a triangle configuration; then they jumped, in wild, push-up movements, like crazed calisthenics. At times, they supported each other, physically and verbally, with comments like, "We're gonna make it," giving the piece a therapy session feel.

Drama also was high in the U.S. premiere of British choreographer Christopher Bruce's 2014 "Shadows,"

set to music by Arvo Part. Anderson, Teague, Steffi Cheong and Danielle Rowe, dressed in street clothes from a previous era, were seemingly a family in crisis, bolting from sitting positions at a table, pairing off, even having tantrums.

While Cheong was stunning in an urgent opening solo, the dance's final compelling moments offered a hint about the characters' troubles.

On the other hand, Penny Saunders' "Soir Bleu," a 2015 dance based on a painting of the same name by Edward Hopper set to a pastiche of music, was harder to read. While the movement and engaging group dynamics showed off the dancers' skills, it was hard to read the tension-filled aspects of the piece, for example, when the performers went up against a mirrored wall.

Still, Cheong, Genshaft, Anderson and Teague, joined by Brett Conway, Jaime Garcia-Castilla and Danielle Rowe, looked terrific.

Intriguing duets rounded out the program: Alejandro Cerrudo's 2012 "Never Was," which started in silence with a single spotlight, morphed into a bold union, as strains of Purcell and Handel accompanied the powerful Rowe and Conway.

The program's most romantic work was Rowe's 2016 "For Pixie," a smoky pas de deux with Laura O'Malley and Conway set to the evocative strains of Nina Simone.