

Roberta on the Arts

RIOULT Dance NY presents: "Te Deum" & "Fire in the Sky" at The Joyce Theater

Roberta E. Zlokower - May 31, 2017

The French-born choreographer, Pascal Rioult, restaged his 1995 *Te Deum* for this Joyce Theater season. A former Graham Principal, there were many allusions here of Mr. Rioult's biography as dancer turned choreographer, with Graham's signature pelvic thrusts and torso contractions, wide arm expressiveness, and intense drama. One of my favorite composers was included for the score, Arvo Pärt, and this recorded choral work with mysterious cadences was mesmerizing. In fact, the entire work was magnetic, as Michael Spencer Phillips took the role previously danced by Mr. Rioult, himself. Mr. Phillips was costumed in a dark suit, early on, and he moved within a smoky stage. The remaining dancers, early on, wore street clothes, a stark contrast to the gold briefs and leotards in the latter section. Kudos to Mondo for costuming, and kudos to Jim French's reconstructed lighting, moving from ethereal dimness to brighter optimism.



Pascal Rioult's "Te Deum" Courtesy of Sofia Negrón

Mr. Rioult's soft, quiet choreography included a male duet for Mr. Phillips and Jere Hunt and a pas de deux for Mr. Phillips and Charis Haines. Ms. Haines' silky white dress fell about Mr. Phillips' shoulders, as he lifted her about the stage. The scene evoked the Graham genre. Other choreographic highlights were quirky gestures, like a foot finding a spot on the floor, that leads the leg into motion, snapping back, returning again, like a solo ballroom dance. The full ensemble imagery was stunning and strong, with some athletic falls, perhaps evoking Mr. Pascal's history as a track and field star in France. This is a work I'd like to revisit.

In complete turnaround, the second work on the program, *Fire in the Sky*, a world premiere, seemed more evocative of Studio 54, with propulsive 1970's rock from a group called Deep Purple. I admit I had never heard of this band, but the music was contagiously rhythmic. You could feel your heart beat faster when the piece began. The Joyce was rocking through the roof. Purple haze and sparkly costumes filled the stage, and four songs, "Smoke on the Water", "Child in Time", "Lazy", and "Highway Star", seamlessly kept the ensemble literally on fire, like the dance's title. Jere Hunt appears as a Mick Jagger type, slick, hip, and energized. You just wanted to be invited to this party onstage. The audience loved it, and so did the cast. Kudos to Pascal Rioult for this terrific program.

