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DanceWorks Highlights Oddball, Intriguing Projects Two-part Concert Debuts 'Ajorca'

By Sid Smith, Special to the Tribune

Just before flying off to tour Germany, DanceWorks Chicago presented "Dance Flight," a two-part concert inviting patrons to attend either or both of a pair of one-hour segments.

The six dancers took on quite a variety of new and older works, from Edgar Zendejas' "Sada," unveiled at DanceWorks' debut in 2008, to Brian Enos' "Ajorca," premiered at Tuesday's concert at the Ruth Page Theater. As a quartet, "Ajorca" offers intermittent excitement, slow at first to mine the speedy possibilities suggested by its Antonio Vivaldi score, though it dutifully builds in alacrity. The choreography swings back and forth from the ho-hum to the enterprising — one dancer briefly runs backward and then gives a little kick in the air, in one interesting instance. There's a romantic duet in which one of the women dances with one partner for a time, but, thanks to nice staging by Enos, winds up with another — formally clean, thematically messy, especially since she ends up alone. In a brief, goofy spell, a woman jazzily wiggles her hands and then her feet before and during a lift.

"Ajorca" might be improved by the addition of more oddities and some cuts in its standard exercises, including what's now something of a yawn of an ending.

Two works from Christian Spuck, the deliciously brief, formally oddball "Paradigm" and "Die Blume," a clever duet involving a flower and rolling carpet, prove that this European-based choreographer is a welcome addition to the troupe's contributors, though the ingenious latter piece ought to be funnier. Gina Patterson's fine, folksy "My Witness" from last year gives touching, provocative visual life to great songs by the Sons of the Never Wrong, while Harrison McElDowney's "Blues for Ann," though a tad disorganized in spots, is a joyous assault of pop and swing — why don't we see more of his work?

The troupe has a conservatory mission, and the young dancers consequently boast disparate styles, lacking a silky unity. The inexperience sometimes shows. In one bit, a woman leapt onto a dancer's back, and he stumbled when presumably he was supposed to stay rigid. Then again, the spins are dizzying. Amber Jackson is sharp and enticingly assured, and James Johnson boasts distilled detail and finesse.

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