



Artbeat: Passages overcomes format s pitfalls

Sunday, May 12, 2002

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The advice typically given to aspiring writers is: Write about what you know.

Columbus choreographer Natalie Marrone demonstrates that that advice works admirably in dance, as well. In her recent evening-length ensemble piece, *Passages*, Marrone has mined her Italian-American heritage for a complex and rich assemblage of innovative dances.

Much recent contemporary choreography has essayed the "evening-length" format but with mixed results. Marrone solves the problem of development, a common stumbling block, with a theme. It may appear an obvious solution, but better clarity than 90 minutes of meaningless pretense, of which this critic has seen more than her share in recent years.

Marrone's piece, danced by her company, the Dance Cure, premiered in the Van Fleet Theatre at the Davis Discovery Center. It's been several years since I've seen dance in this space, but I don't ever recall it being used as imaginatively as Marrone does here. The walls, corners, ceiling and, of course, floor all are employed interestingly but fittingly.

Two subthemes circulate throughout the work: tarantulas, to whom the Italians have dedicated both dance and musical genres called tarantellas; and the Ave Maria, honoring the country's strong Catholic heritage.

One section focused on a spider suspended from the ceiling, a la Little Miss Muffet. In another, it crept slowly across its "web" (created by clever lighting on a wall). Elsewhere, the bitten women dance into a frenzy to rid themselves of the poison.

But when the full ensemble was used, as in the two Ave Maria sections and the *Divertissement: Pigeons in the Park*, Marrone so skillfully timed and directed entrances and exits that the relatively small dance space never looked cramped.

Many of the dances have a folk base from southern Italy. The music also is well-chosen, reflecting the diverse ways in which certain ideas and melodies have been treated in different times and places and by different performers.

Marrone's company of strong female dancers has a professional look, in both performance and manner. These ladies dance with confidence and spirit. While costuming should certainly not be a deciding factor, the wonderful dresses and spider outfits created for the troupe by Kathleen Reilly-Reau deserve kudos.

It's not every day you see a chorus line of pigeons one minute and tarantulas creeping across the floor the next. Until last night I thought that was a good thing.