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Mixing Bits From Columns A and B

When we complain that an artist is unoriginal, what do we mean? Some of the most original artists have not been among the greatest. Virgil, Shakespeare, Mozart, Balanchine

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DANCE REVIEW

were all heavily derivative. The choreographer Pascal Rioult, whose company, Rioult, opened its weeklong season at the Joyce Theater on Tuesday, has attractive dancers, appealing music (some of it live) and plenty of real professional choreographic skills. I tick off these and other virtues approvingly. Yet every Rioult work makes me feel as if I'd been there before.

This isn't primarily about specific debts owed by Rioult. Still, let's begin with dance makers he resembles, going back at least to Martha Graham. In agreeable aspects he's reminiscent of Mark Morris: the mixture of academic dance steps (ballet and modern) with more informal or offbeat gestures; the music-related organization of dance motifs; the no-nonsense presentation of female-female, male-male, female-male and male-female partnering as equal.

These echoes are more than O.K. Rossini — so goes one story — told Donizetti that he liked the opera in which Donizetti had lifted something from a Rossini work. Donizetti said, "But I've never heard that opera of yours," whereupon Rossini said calmly, "In that case we both lifted it from the same source."

The suggestions of Graham in "Harvest" (1992) really are incidental. But its overall sense of pastoral lyricism; its evocations of old agricultural gestures, tasks and rural-laborer folk dance; its occasional isolation (or exclu-

Rioult continues through Jan. 24 at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, at 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 691-9740, joyce.org.



Patrick Leahy and Charis Haines in Pascal Rioult's "Shadow Box," which had its world premiere on Tuesday at the Joyce. The music is by Bach.

Rioult
Joyce Theater

sion) of an individual or a soloist within (or from) the larger group; its use of folk music: these made me exclaim, "I must have seen that dance by 10 different choreographers over the last 30 years!"

Rioult actually does it better than several others. Motifs from Jean-François Millet's paintings are pleasantly integrated; David Finley's lighting casts a glow on the scene; the dancers — Patrick Leahy, as "the young man," is the most eye-catching — are at their

most innocent and absorbed; and nothing is unbearably sentimental. Still, the mind wanders. You applaud Rioult's professionalism, but he adds no new twists to the old formula.

"Shadow Box" and "City," each set to Bach, received their world premieres on Tuesday night; Hsiang Tu (piano) and Shih-Kai Lin (violin) played live. The two works stood in nice contrast to each other: "Shadow Box" (to selected Preludes and Fugues from "The Well-Tempered Clavier") is all black and white, in costumes, silhouettes, video projections and lighting; "City" (to the Sonata for Violin and Piano

No. 6 in G major) is colorful in clothing and in its projections (long, traveling shots of urban architecture).

They have resemblances too. Each is a quartet for two men and two women; each responds, though without slavishness, to multiple layers of the music; each catches Bach's opposition and connection of emotionally fraught lines and larger mathematical structures.

"Shadow Box" involves intricately clever magic-theater effects of shadow, light and projection. Just as you assume that a shadow figure is being cast by a live dancer, it floats or spins in

ways that seem physically impossible. The choreography keeps the dancers mainly separate, though cross-references abound. "City," however, has couples, interaction and lifts — a man slowly floats across the stage in another's hands — as well as a sense of lone pedestrian movement and personal expressions (a silent cry).

But it's all so earnest, so stolid. And that applies to "Bolero" (2002) too, though it is the evening's biggest audience hit. Certainly here my mind never strayed. Ravel's famous score sets up a drastic contrast between chugging, recycling, accumul-

Echoes of Martha Graham and of Mark Morris.

ing orchestral pattern and legato solo-voice melody (with different instruments succeeding one another), and Rioult is at his most virtuosic in the ways he matches this with movement. He's clever, too, in showing how human sensuousness is part of the mix.

INSIDE

Tracing The Echoes
Mark Morris meets Martha Graham in the work of Pascal Rioult.
PAGE 5.



ANDREA