

They Define Excellence in Male Dancing

Posted by Wendy Perron on Thursday, Nov 29, 2007



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At two recent galas, Daniel Ulbricht at NYCB and **Matthew Rushing at Ailey** took my breath away. In completely different idioms, they both glowed with the mastery of their forms. They made you sit up, they made you keep up, they made you realize the completeness of great dancing.

At the NYCB gala November 20, Ulbricht performed in *Grazioso*, a new piece by Peter Martins for three men and that powerhouse known as Ashley Bouder.

Whenever Ulbricht was dancing, you could relax *and* get excited. He's a short guy and not ideally proportioned, but that has no impact on his impact. His own excitement in dancing is grounded by his sureness; he seems close to the earth. You never worry that he might fall. He plows into Herculean jumps and turns with bounding energy and joy. His technique is every bit as great as the wonder boys of ABT, but minus that bravura and plus a kind of unselfconscious athleticism. Martins has given him not only difficult jumps and turns, but some folk steps that he accents with fervor and sharpness. Everything he does is touched with humor and wit—and this incredible, grounded assurance.

At the Ailey gala last night, Matthew Rushing performed Ailey's solo *Reflections in D* (1962) to music by Duke Ellington. How can a man express joy and sadness at the same moment? I don't know but Rushing does. He switches from sharp extensions to oozy undulations on a dime. His contractions go deep into his center, and when he reaches his arm out, his whole body is involved. You feel that reach. Then you feel the breaking up of the arm, thwarted in its reach. The connectedness throughout his body is what is so moving.

When he took the center man's part in "Rocka My Soul," the last part of *Revelations*, along with the great Renee Robinson, I was in heaven. I almost didn't miss seeing Dudley Williams in that role. The elbows beating forward, the legs swooping back...the joy, the sass contained in the body and soul rocking.

Both these dancers have been with their respective companies for years and they live and breathe the repertoire. When you watch them dance, you don't just realize how good they are; you get pumped up about how good dance can be, how it can take over a whole person onstage and overwhelm you with pleasure, even just sitting in the house.



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's **Matthew Rushing** in Alvin Ailey's *Reflections in D*. Photo: Eduardo Patino, NYC.