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Performing Arts: Dance

PASCAL RIOULT

June 6, 2013

On opening night at the Joyce Theater, Rioult Dance presented four works: Iphigenia, (World Premiere), Prelude to Night (2002), On Distant Shores (2011), and Bolero (2002).

Pascal Rioult's focus on women as central figures permeated three of the evening's works, featuring strong and moving performances by Jane Sato, Penélope Gonzalez, Charis Haines, and Marianna Tsartolia.

The evening began with the world premiere of Iphigenia, by far, the most intriguing and beautifully crafted work on the program. Rioult proves his growing ability to successfully collaborate with several well known artists, weaving many intricate parts together with his amazing cast of technically astute dancers, to unite all into a coherent, inspiring whole.

Rioult's dance roots belong to Martha Graham, and we can definitely see this influence in the formality and strength of dance technique, focus on a female heroine with supporting iconic chorus, and concern for Greek myth, tragedy, romantic drama, and universal themes of family, patriotism, fate, sacrifice.

With live music composed by Michael Torke, Iphigenia, and conducted by Richard Owen, the curtain rises to an austere, abstract wooden set designed by Harry Feiner which depicts Agamemnon's shipwreck, or of a landscape suggesting ancient Greek or contemporary locations: woods, a thicket, a house, the world.

The two main female characters, Clytemnestra, the mother, danced by Marianna Tsartolia and Iphigenia, the daughter and heroine, danced by the small, compact Jane Sato, begin the Greek story of Iphigenia's eventual sacrifice to appease an angry goddess in order to win the battle against Troy.

Jim French's lighting, contemporary, flattering all white costumes by Karen Young which also suggest an ancient Greek design, and narration by Jacqueline Chambord based on Euripide's original text, support Pascal Rioult's choreography quite successfully as his male and female cast enact an interpretation of Iphigenia through a half hour of abstract modern dance pinned to a narrative.

Prelude to Night (2002), with music by Maurice Ravel, depicts a central female figure in a dream state through time and space danced this evening by Penelope Gonzalez, supported by David Finley's lighting that suggests nightmare, fear, the unknown. The success of this choreography falls victim to its melodramatic adherence to the dominating musical score.

Rioult continues his fascination with strong, yet vulnerable women and Greek themes in On Distant Shores (2011), with the exquisitely fluid, technically brilliant, and memorable performance of company dancer Charis Haines as Helen of Troy, supported by a handsomely strong male quartet depicting Trojan War heroes: Brian Flynn, Josiah Guitian, Jere Hunt, and Holt Walborn. The well-rehearsed company ended the evening with Rioult's signature dance to Ravel's insistently seductive Bolero