Review: Dancing Moons Festival

Oakland Ballet

Oakland Asian Cultural Center

March 24-26, 2002

A Graceful Event

Graham Lustig, Artistic Director of the Oakland Ballet, has made the company an integral part of the community by reaching out and bringing its components into the Ballet School and Ballet performances. The company has sponsored events at various community holidays and brought performances to schools and community centers. Here at the Oakland Asian Cultural Center with the event entitled “Dancing Moons Festival”, he features dancers and choreographers of Asian cultural heritage.

The evening began with an informative informal discussion of choreographic input with the dancers and choreographers moderated by Robert Minz of the SF Asian Art Museum. It was an important time to learn the motivation and material presented. Technically the microphones and amplification would have made the discussion clearer.

Before the dancing began pitas Min Kwon played a composition for the piano by Derrick Skye, entitled “Woven Gesture, Flow”. It set a lyrical atmosphere for the dancing that followed. Choreographer Phil Chan set dancers Paunika Jones and Alberto Andrade into a lyric mode entitled “Amber Waves”. The dancers executed a beautiful ‘pas de deux’ demonstrating bravura technique and fine partnership.

Next, a quartet of dancers, Jazmine Quezada, Lawrence Chen, Samantha Bell and Aiden O’Leary performed a fast, dynamic exchange of dynamic energy featuring exuberant lifts, holds, catches and falls. It seems that current ballet technique is infused with gymnastic tumbling. I find Lawrence Chen particularly fun to watch.

The most “ethnic” event so far was Ahana Mukherjee, guest artist, performing “Malkauna Tarana” a work conceived and composed by Pandit Chitresh Das.

The artist displayed wonderful rhythmic foot work, extraordinary turning and expressive facial responses to bring authenticity to this dance. It made for variation in a program of ballet.

“Layer upon Layer” a trio for Jazmine Quezada, Ashley Thopiah and Lawrence Chen, performed by the “Youth of Pirae” group, also demonstrated exuberant ballet skills layered with lively floor work. The energy and enthusiastic performers is extraordinary. Choreographically one might wish for more design, structure and range of movement ideas.

The Oakland Asian Art Center has a pleasant auditorium. The stage is not large; the dancers filled it with ease. The audience sits in chairs; there is not raking, so that watching dance with heads tilted to see becomes tiresome. But, it was a special event for a special community effort…and all must be congratulated.

The evening continued with works by Linli Wang, Phil Chan, the Parangal Dance Company and choreographer Michael Lowe, who was with the original Oakland Ballet.

This reviewer was not able to stay after intermission.

{The program was dedicated to the memory of Wilma Chan.}

Joanna G. Harris