

Program Notes — Moving Works

Premiere: April 18, 1996, The O'Shaughnessy, Saint Paul, Minnesota
Choreography by James Sewell
Lighting by Kevin A. Jones
Costumes by Mary Hansmeyer

Music by J. S. Bach, Combustible Edison, Claudio Monteverdi, Peter Gabriel

Original Cast:

Christian Burns
Elizabeth Eisenhardt
Penelope Freeh
Joel Klausler
Anna Laghezza
Brian Levy
Sally Rousse
James Sewell

What to name the new ballet? Words like “tartan,” “plaid,” and “arachne” came to mind – words that hint at the silky patterns we weave. The movement itself is a dialect of the multiple coordination work I have been exploring for the past ten years.

I started choreographing with no specific drama in mind. But the body moving against itself, attempting to express the constant duality present in the human condition, quickly came to the surface. Richard Cavendish says it eloquently in “Mythology”: “Myths state, in a veiled form, contradictions inherent in life which the conscious mind is unwilling to confront...Stories of the topsy-turvy state of things in the world of myth attempt to mediate between opposites to resolve them.”

In the new ballet, dancers individually display several rhythms at a time (one arm moving in two counts, the other in four, while the legs dance in 3/4 time, the body allying itself with the four-count arm). Now and then, the dancers and their various limbs join up, only to drop their patterns and form new ones. Along the way, a movement quality is produced which (I hope) looks different – beautiful or pleasing to at least one part of the brain.

The patterns relate to the music (Bach and Combustible Edison) and to folk dancing. They can be mesmerizing to watch and dizzying to do. Timing is everything here: one false move and the group crashes. We rehearse this section daily because we need the repetition, I like watching it, and because we are learning that this way of moving works.

— James Sewell, 1996