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Dance Review

Velcro Jackets, Wistful Songs and an Inherent Sense of Fun

By Jennifer Dunning

David Parker knows his ballet. He also knows something about romantic love, roustabout physical comedy and the pleasure of plain body shapes and patterns. The dances presented by Mr. Parker and his Bang Group last Saturday night at Dance Theater Workshop engaged an unusual range of audience members, too, to judge by the laughter and empathic coos that came from young children as well as adults. In all, the program was a surefire tonic for the ills of winter and the world. Bottle that man. The evening began on a high note with Friends of Dorothy, a dance for Mr. Parker and Jeffrey Kazin that was set to Debbie Reynolds's breathily wistful singing of "Why Not Me," Jane Powell's coloratura rendition of "Over the Rainbow" and the music for the barn-raising dance in the film "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers." Mr. Parker and Mr. Kazin began as a pair of hoedown hoofers and then slipped into a comical but poignant duet whose partnering said a great deal about love. Inter 1, performed by Marta Miller, Amber Sloan and Emily Tschiffely, juxtaposed extremely simple yet expressive shape-play with Frank Sinatra's "I Fall in Love Too Easily." In Inter 2, Ms. Tschiffely self-destructed amusingly while Ethel Merman belted out "There's No Business Like Show Business." And Mr. Parker and Mr. Kazin stuck tellingly to each other's Velcro suit jackets, designed by Melanie Rozema and Jeroen Teunissen, in Slapstuck. Enough, set to Rachmaninoff piano music and performed by Mary Cochran, Mr. Kazin, Mr. Parker and Ms. Sloan, demonstrated that Mr. Parker could make a well-constructed traditional quartet without losing his sense of humor and humanity. But the best came last, in Cracked, a suite of dances excerpted from his Nutcracker. Set to pop versions of Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker" music and to the real orchestral thing, Cracked made something new from the classical idiom. And Mr. Parker's reinvention of the ballet's pas de deux — for himself and Mr. Kazin — was brilliant as well as side-splittingly funny. Mr. Kazin is a treat, a gifted dancer with an inherently comical air of innocent purposefulness.