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Emanuel Gat Dance: From 'Winter Voyage' to 'The Rite of Spring'

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The Lincoln Center Festival presented two dance performances back to back on Wednesday night. The opening of Emanuel Gat Dance, the late show at LaGuardia Concert Hall, could not have provided a starker contrast to the athletic flamboyance of "Streb vs. Gravity," which had just ended next door at LaGuardia Drama Theater.

Two men, their heads shaven, both barefoot and androgynously dressed in dark pants overlaid with long, sleeveless, steel-blue dresses, ducked and posed and twisted their arms and torsos in silence. Then came the first of three songs from Schubert's "Winterreise," canonically sung by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and played by the pianist Gerald Moore, interspersed with more silence.

Mr. Gat's dance, "Winter Voyage," involved only these two men: Mr. Gat, the taller one, and Roy Assaf. Their synchronicity was amazing, hypnotic. In the last song, "Der Leiermann" ("The Organ-Grinder"), there were hints of mimesis; the two looked hunched with age, twisted with mortality. But mostly the dancing floated free of the texts' imagery. Their movements varied some from song to song; sometimes they were floor-based, sometimes they leaped and skipped.

But mostly they circled each other, as if in a trance. They stared into each other's eyes; they stood side by side, arms but not hands touching. Even on opposite ends of the wide stage, the tension between them was palpable.

Their sinuousness of movement was a constant fascination. Mr. Gat started late in dance, in his early 20's, after Israeli military service and studying music. Yet his bodily command, and that of Mr. Assaf, was remarkable. The aura was not so much homoerotic as pansexual, longing touched with wintry despair.

Mr. Gat founded his company two years ago in Tel Aviv, although he is now building a base for himself in Kiryat Gat in the Negev region. His version of "The Rite of Spring," with Stravinsky's score deafeningly amplified and luridly played by Leonard Bernstein and the London Symphony Orchestra, was the company's first big hit. It's striking, but not as striking as "Winter Voyage."

Here the two men, in black pants and shirts, are joined by three women, slinkily costumed in black dresses split up the sides or with décolletage and bare back. The dance takes place on or around a two-toned rectangular rug, the center a vivid red, the border a dusky reddish-brown. Costumes and the red-tinged lighting design are by Mr. Gat.

The entire work seems a stylized exercise in partnered social dancing, the symmetry skewed by the imbalance between the two men and the three women. Sometimes it's one man and two women. In the end — the only overt bow to the sacrificial scenario of the original — one of the women, her back to the audience, deliberately pins up her hair, then strolls over to the other four lying on the rug, and slowly reclines, then is left alone as the others leave.

For me, the formality of the choreography was a little off-putting, cold, although always searchingly intelligent. The women — Avital Mano, Doron Raz and Alexandra Shmurak — danced well but remained decorative next to the mastery of the men. Still, the overall consistency of vision was deeply impressive.