

SANTA BARBARA INDEPENDENT

# *A Review of Trey McIntyre Project at Campbell Hall*

## *Contemporary Ballet Company Has Signature Style*

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“I’m being swallowed by a boa constrictor,” a female voice crooned. A chorus of children sang along, a little off-key. Long-legged John Michael Schert stood at center stage, his tight black shorts and cropped green jacket making him look like a small boy who’d suddenly found himself in a man’s body. But when he moved, Schert was another thing altogether—hunching, disjointed shoulders, writhing head and neck, aching long lines—part man, part snake, part god.

This was the opening of “Leatherwing Bat,” first on the program for contemporary ballet company Trey McIntyre Project’s Santa Barbara debut. Set to the songs of Peter, Paul & Mary from their 1969 children’s album, the piece took a ride through the fantastic world of “Puff, the Magic Dragon” and the hyperactive overexertion of “Going to the Zoo.” As in real child’s play, there was conflict here, even outright aggression, as well as the joy of full-blown physicality. Before the piece was over, McIntyre’s signature style was clear: a blend of highly technical, classical ballet with a frenetic gestural language of twitches and flicks.

From “Leatherwing Bat,” McIntyre moved into a discordant world with “(serious),” a trio set to scores by modern composer Henry Cowell. Here as before there were echoes of William Forsyth: scythe-like arms above low-slung, swiveling hips. Languor and sexual tension hinted at a dystopian world—the dancers in slacks and dress shirts were like young business professionals cracking up under pressure. In “(serious),” McIntyre’s

already busy movement became verbose, at times so over-stimulated that it left no space for contemplation. Rare moments of stillness came like breeze in an airless room.

In “A Day in the Life,” McIntyre took on the daunting task of setting an original ballet to the Beatles. As with the program’s opener, there was a danger here either of falling into campy literalism or of departing into a jarringly abstract reverie. For the most part, McIntyre threaded the needle, moving from flashy, Broadway-esque ensemble unison in “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da” to a powerful male trio for “Strawberry Fields Forever.” In this work, the men took the limelight, particularly the super-lithe Brett Perry, whose unleashed dancing in “Got to Get You into My Life” goes down among the most gratifying performances I’ve seen.