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Dance Review | Trey McIntyre Project

A Dance About a Dream About Living Seriously

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Before Trey McIntyre moved his company to Boise, Idaho, in 2008, he was an established choreographer. For 12 years he had served as the choreographic associate of the Houston Ballet while also branching out to create dances for troupes like Ballet Memphis, American Ballet Theater and the Washington Ballet.

With Trey McIntyre Project, which made its New York debut at the Joyce Theater on Tuesday night, he is finally on his own. In many ways the program is jarring, perhaps because Mr. McIntyre has too much to say, or to prove. He is a musical choreographer, but the new dances are breathless, busy works that leave little space for ideas to rise above the surface of a flurry of steps and gestures.

The opening dance, “Leatherwing Bat,” set to songs sung by Peter, Paul and Mary, begins with John Michael Schert standing in the center of the stage while four others slowly close in on his spotlight. The lyrics “I’m being swallowed by a boa constrictor, and I don’t like it very much” add a sinister twist as Mr. Schert crosses the stage in bounding pas de chat leaps, pausing briefly every so often to kick up his steely legs in slashing strokes.

Like the choreography that follows, movement is frenetic and volatile no matter the mood, which wavers between playful and sad. The story loosely concerns a family; Mr.

Schert, seems to resemble the stern father (or, later, a grown boy) and Virginia Pilgrim, the mother. Brett Perry, as the son, demonstrates a childlike gaiety that gives way to pubescent loneliness. The abrupt tale of lost innocence glides speedily along until Mr. Schert is left alone on the stage, slowly receding into the darkness as “Puff the Magic Dragon” grows in volume.

The title of the program’s centerpiece — “(serious)” — refers to a dream Mr. McIntyre had in which the screenwriter Charlie Kaufman told a story about the word “serious,” used as a stage direction. Chanel DaSilva, Jason Hartley and Mr. Perry, dressed identically in white shirts, gray slacks and matching ballet slippers, move with supple insouciance and little awareness of one another, suggesting that they are different aspects of the same person.

For Mr. McIntyre the word “serious” doesn’t correspond so much to an overly grave performance approach as to a rigorous unemotional attack. The movement is marked by stiff arms and punchy stops and starts, which mirror the darting shifts in Henry Cowell’s music. Leaping into the arms of the men, Ms. DaSilva holds on tightly as the dancers come together in a final, succinct embrace.

In “Ma Maison” Mr. McIntyre is inspired by music of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. Here the dancers’ faces are entirely camouflaged by Michael Curry’s spooky skeleton masks. Moving with a bouncier step, they possess the elasticity of marionettes. Mr. McIntyre taps into the music with vigor, and finally the dancers are more than just spirited performers; they are spirits in the flesh.