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Review: 'Colony' adds shine to Los Angeles Ballet's 'NextWave LA'

By Jean Lenihan

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The final bill of Los Angeles Ballet's sixth season, "NextWave LA" is the company's annual new works program (known previously as "New Wave LA"), featuring area choreographers. It's where you can count on loud amplifiers, the shedding of tutus and hair clips, and the sight of the self-same ballerina you saw comporting like a regal queen in "Swan Lake" or "The Nutcracker" now writhing in extreme throes.

This year's contemporary bill -- featuring premieres by TV veterans Sonya Tayeh and Stacey Tookey ("So You Think You Can Dance") plus established choreographers Josie Walsh and Kitty McNamee -- may feel to be even more of a stark and risky contrast than previous years since for the first time an L.A. Ballet season has offered only story ballets and no Balanchine.

Besides smoothing the distance between classical serenity and stark abstraction, Balanchine ballets also deftly convey the rigorous design and rehearsal values that should bridge both worlds.

[PHOTOS: Los Angeles Ballet](#)

Yet thanks to McNamee's opener, a mature and mysterious Euro-style group work called "colony," the company looks lustrous. The debut came Saturday at the Redondo Beach Performing Arts Center; the program moves next to Glendale's Alex Theatre, then the Broad Stage in Santa Monica.

Set to Anna Clyne's electronica and cello, "colony" features the metamorphoses of a mostly female brethren as one individualist (retiring dancer Kelly Ann Sloan) makes a break.

Outfitted in Kanique Thomas' ceremonial black coats and silhouetted in chill, harsh light by designer Ben Pilat, the group begins an eerie circling blizzard that morphs into many new geometries. McNamee's ensemble pointe work here is mesmerizingly chilly -- inscribing arcs, measuring distances, the dancers' precise feet move like the points and arms of drafting compasses. Meanwhile, the port de bras are kept minimalist and meaningful. Fresh and original, surely "colony" belongs in L.A. Ballet's permanent repertory, alongside Balanchine and Lar Lubovitch.

[PHOTOS: Los Angeles Ballet](#)

Though well danced, sadly the bill falls off from here. Set to Icelandic composer Ólafur Arnalds, Tayeh's "Duets in the act of..." features four obvious couples -- "cold desperation" (Allyssa Bross, Zheng Hua Li), "artificial seduction" (Julia Cinquemani, Vincent S. Adams), "fleeting nostalgia" (Kate Highstrete, Nicolas de la Vega) and "false ego" (Allyne Noelle, Alexander Castillo). Fleeting moments when Tayeh layered the duos, suggesting links between the differing motivations, signaled the stronger piece that might have been.

Josie Walsh's "Sirens," scored by her husband Paul Rivera Jr., is yet another retelling of the Odysseus myth

of sailors battling watery enchantresses. Men cover their ears, shaking their heads; women bourrée en pointe with undulating arms. One expects the likes of Rihanna to emerge from a trap door to hasten “Sirens” to its end.

The final work, “Be Still,” with choreography by Tookey to a score featuring Matthew Banks (Blue Man group) and Icelandic composer Jóhann Jóhannsson, is a subtle, dynamic group piece about time that is currently overwhelmed by its emphatic, confusing design (again by Thomas and Pilat). Why a piece about time’s echoes and waves occurs in fringed two-piece suits -- with white-hot spotlights-- distracts to an impossible degree.

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"NextWave LA" Los Angeles Ballet, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Alex Theatre, Glendale; 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. May 26, 2 p.m. May 27, the Broad Stage, Santa Monica. \$30-\$95. (310) 998-7782 or www.losangelesballet.org

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