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Mr. Musical Dramey

By: GUS SOLOMONS JR

A company calling itself the Chase Brock Experience - in multicolored letters, no less -- has set the bar pretty high for itself. Brock is a young choreographer whose claim to fame is having assisted Broadway biggies Kathleen Marshall and Ann Reinking. On May 22-25 at Joyce SoHo, the second New York season of his spiffy troupe demonstrated his facility for moving people around the stage effectively and putting together rhythmically clever, fast-paced steps.

His ensemble of ten dancers has impressive commercial theater credentials (MOMIX, "The Lion King," Radio City, "So You Think You Can Dance?", "Cats"). They perform with the slick, spunky Broadway armor that can survive eight shows a week. Such relentless exuberance is generally suspect on the concert stage, and some of Brock's choreography is facile to a fault. But commissioned scores accompany the three premieres in the first act, and the set -- a four-panel color field painting that spans the rear wall -- and colorful, well-made costumes by Dane Laffrey make for an eye-pleasing production.

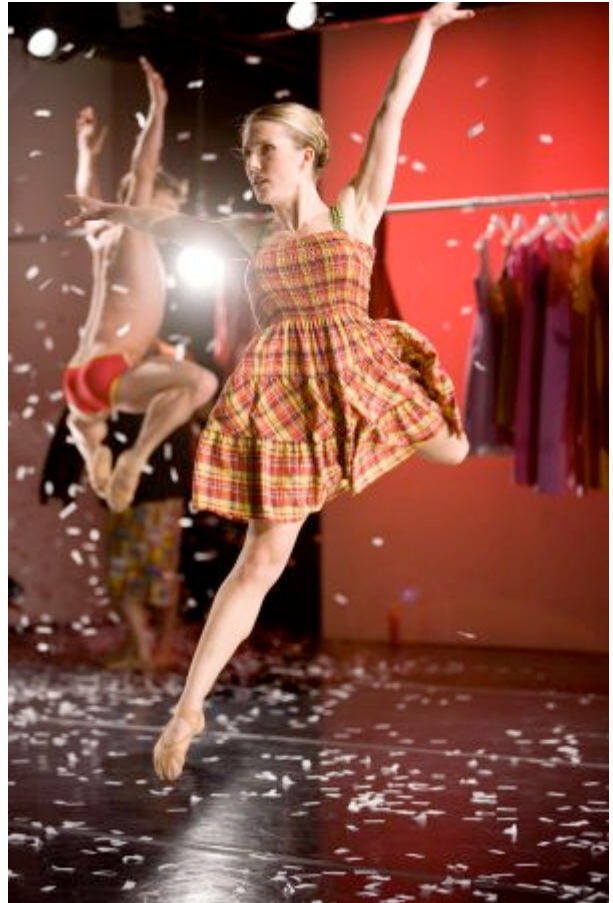
In "Warner Variations," set to three original piano pieces by Jan Warner, Natalie Lomonte, Yukiko Kashiki, Lex Dones, and Connor Kilian Weigand, wearing black dance pants and jazz shoes, breeze through jazzy spins and balletic jumps, exuding the passion of their effort but relating only to the audience, not each other. The romantic duet "Dusk" has a sweet piano-cello score by Joseph Zellnik. Nathan Duszny and Marimba Gold-Watts in turquoise and white can't quite finesse some of the partnering transitions -- not their fault.

"Mission: Implausible" takes three couples in black and white outfits through a cavalcade of movie references -- a speeding locomotive that nearly decapitates the maiden tied to the tracks; a jungle safari; a posh gallery opening; a triple tango -- all matched step for note with Joshua Rosenblum's score for winds, "Cut to the Chase." The dance would be a shoo-in for a hypothetical musical comedy.

Brock's choreography is very presentational and yes, clichéd, but it's redeemed by his smart rhythmic manipulation. This light, airy dancing with its forced smiles and relentless exuberance is what the Technicolor program on glossy paper and stage crew in logo T-shirts would lead one to expect -- a sugary sweet, feel-good experience.

The second act, however, moves beyond light entertainment with Brock's rendition of "The Four Seasons," using Vivaldi's familiar score. After a predictably bright, springy first section that's reminiscent of Paul Taylor's gracious lyricism and Susan Stroman's cleverly recycled steps, Roz G. (actress Katie Rayle in a dead-on send-up of a TV weather girl) enters amongst the dancers and, while they change out of their spring attire, predicts an unprecedented temperature rise. "It's 135-degrees; it's a frigging record!"

The dancers reappear in beachwear, and swelter, rubbing on lotion, swatting mosquitoes, playing volleyball, and making love in the sand. All the costumes hang on a pole upstage that lowers imperceptibly during the course of the dance. A sudden snowstorm



Anna Kaiser, with Ryan Jackson in the background, dancing "Four Seasons."

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interrupts their play, they shiver and huddle, and Roz returns to note the phenomenon with her synthetic cheeriness. Intimations of global climate change emerge. Brock uses the music cleverly to support his narrative.

When the "Autumn" section comes, the dancers don lush, faux-18th century garb. Ashley Eichbauer appears to be pregnant. She retires and returns, dressed in a plain black shift, for a sad lyric solo, seemingly having lost the baby. As the dancing continues, people are felled by some unknown pestilence; they collapse and some recover. Roz delivers restorative health drinks, which revive all but one victim.

In the "Winter" section, the dancers in black bikinis fall to irrational behavior, scribbling on walls with imaginary chalk, running around madly, fainting and reviving, fantasizing volleyball again. Another person dies. Everyone, also including Ryan Patrick Farrell, Ryan Jackson, and Anna Kaiser, flies into a leaping, flailing rage as the music swells to its finale. The ballet, which began almost frivolously, turns into a genuinely moving work, with a powerful point of view, an expression of potential terrestrial disaster. Who'd have thought such a naively playful beginning could become so profound?

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