

Ballet Pacifica shows practice makes perfect

By Devorah Knaff
Special to the Daily Pilot

Ballet Pacifica's summer choreographic workshop was a charming, low-key affair that afforded a wealth of good dancing and innovative dance-making.

The annual workshop brought the company's dancers together with four choreographers for two weeks.

The fact that four quite-polished works resulted from it is a reminder to just how much a group of people can accomplish when they concentrate their minds and bodies.

The four works performed by the company Saturday in the intimacy of South Coast Repertory's main stage varied widely, although all stood at the stylistic edge of contemporary

ballet and mixed moments of narrative into essentially abstract works. All also shared a deep sense of musicality, which is that surprising since the choreographers were more familiar with the music than with the dancers.

Kirk Peterson's "Ritual" accumulated a slow-motion work set to music by Benjamin Britten was the most lyrical offering of the evening, an intricate series of geometries playing upon shapes formed both by the dancers, individual bodies and the patterns formed by groups of people.

The whole piece was bound up into spirals, with movements and bodies that curled into themselves. While the work in places lacked the warmth one would have liked — the dancers sometimes seemed to be dancing parallel to each other rather than actually with each other — this problem seems likely to be worked out over time.

Mark Haim's untitled work was a series of reflections on flight and enticement as Kitty Sue McCoy and James Cameron alternately met and pulled apart, energized each other and devitalized each other. Infused with an air of uneasy waiting — established by both music and a simple set of an interrogation lamp swinging over a table and the mystical use of glowing ping pong balls — the piece was strikingly innovative and compelling.

Watching Monica Levy's "Glass," set to Morton Subotnick's rather difficult music, was something like peering into a microscope. The dancers performed a series of collidings like microbes — or

A2 Thursday, August 6, 1992

Newport Beach/Costa Mesa Daily Pilot

perhaps atoms — bouncing off each other.

While one would expect the result of such grand scale Brownian motion to be ungraceful at best, in fact the piece became progressively more fluid, in the end resembling a waltz as much as a ballet. Like Haim, Levy also used rather mystifying props — in this case a tea set — to good effect.

The final piece of the evening was Billy Siegenfeld's "Two Songs for Goin' Ga-Ga" set to popular songs of the 1920s and '30s. The result was a jazzy piece full of joy and the ingenuous sexuality that each generation decries in the dances of the next.

The choreographers answered questions from the audience between numbers and the result was both disarmingly charming and — unlike so often the case with such forums — quite

informative.

The works were performed essentially without costumes — a few chiffon skirts had been added here, a few brightly colored T-shirts there, but the effect was elegant rather than shabby. The addition of Liz Stillwell's dramatic and powerful lighting design to these simple costumes and bare stage created a sense of urbane refinement.

This is what dance is all about, the evening seemed to say — forget all those flashy sets and gaudy tutus. This is what it all comes down to: the music and the movement and the dancers.

And, of course, that is precisely right. Devorah Knaff's ballet review is running in place of Stage Lites, a weekly entertainment column written by Matt Coker, who is on vacation. His column will return next week.