

Oberon's Grove

Dances We Dance ~ PASSAGES



Above: Francesca Todesco in Isadora Duncan's *Scriabin Études*; photo by Steven Pisano

Author: Oberon

Sunday June 5th, 2022 matinee - At the Theater at St. Jean's on Lexington Avenue, dancer and choreographer Francesca Todesco's newly-formed company, **Dances We Dance**, offering a program of works by Isadora Duncan and new choreography by Catherine Gallant and Ms. Todesco. These debut performances by **Dances We Dance** were dedicated to the memory of dancer and educator Betty Jones, a founding member of member of the José Limón Dance Company. In October, 2019. I had the great pleasure of meeting Ms. Jones when she and her husband Fritz Ludin gave a master-class here in New York City, to which Francesca invited me. Though her health was fading, Ms. Jones engaged me in a charming conversation about footwear.

I hadn't ventured across Central Park in many moons, and I was not sure til the morning of the show whether I would be up for such a trek. The gorgeous weather seemed a happy omen, and everything went very smoothly. It was so nice to see Francesca's husband Claudio again, and my longtime friends Catherine Gallant, Loretta Thomas, and Audrey Ross after such a long hiatus.



Above: dancer Rosy Gentle in *Reflets d'Allemagne/Nuremberg*; photo by Steven Pisano

To open the program, Francesca Todesco, whose dance career has been steeped in the choreography of Isadora Duncan and Anna Sokolow, re-created three "lost" sections of Isadora Duncan's *Reflets d'Allemagne*, a rarely-seen work set to music by French composer Florent Schmitt. Schmitt wrote this series of eight musical vignettes after traveling through Europe in the early 20th century. Isadora Duncan's choreography for three of the sections remains with us, and with Ms. Todesco three additional sections, the work took shape. The two remaining sections - *Heidelberg* and *Munich* - were performed as musical interludes by the afternoon's vibrant pianists Nathaniel LaNasa (the Company's music director) and Isidora Vladic.



Above: from *Reflets d'Allemagne*; photo by Steven Pisano

With *Heidelberg* as prelude, the dancers appeared at first in silhouette. This was followed by *Dresden*, with its original Duncan choreography danced by Colleen Edwards, Kathleen Caragine, and Margherita Tisato. The next three sections - *Koblenz*, *Werder*, and *Vienna* - were choreographed by Ms. Todesco in the Isadora style, with Rosy Gentle joining the afore-named dancers. *Vienna*, danced before a red back-panel, was especially impressive in its sense of drama.



Above: from *Reflets d'Allemagne/Werder*; photo by Alex Gramma; the dancers are Rosy Gentle (on the floor, facing us); Colleen Edwards (center, seated), and Margherita Tisato (with her back to us)

The lighting turned deep blue as Mr. LaNasa and Ms. Vladic gave a stellar performance of *Munich*. Mlles. Gentle, Caragine, and Tisato then danced *Lübeck*, a ritual of comforting, and the Company joined together for the final *Nuremberg*, a waltzy piece danced in golden light.



Now Francesca Todesco (above, in an Alex Gramma photo) appeared in a red gown to dance Isadora Duncan's immortal masterpiece, *Scriabin Études*; these demanding piano works were commandingly played by Mr. LaNasa.

In a pool of light, the dancer gave a hypnotic performance of the three solos: *The Crossing*, *Mother*, and *Revolutionary*. These dances are called "timeless" for a reason: today, the seeking and invoking of *The Crossing*, the tender farewell of the bereaved *Mother*, and the silent screams of *Revolutionary* all took on relevancy to events we read of daily in headlines about our faltering democracy, of the shootings of innocent children, and of a horrific war brought on by one man's vanity. Francesca Todesco's powerful and poetic dancing, aligned to Mr. LaNasa's splendid playing, made for a compelling experience.



Following the interval, dancer Margherita Tisato (above, in a Steven Pisano photo) took command of the stage for *The Calling*, a

solo work choreographed by Francesca Todesco to music by Frederic Chopin and George Ivanovich Gurdjieff. Costumed by Ivana Drazic in a white nightgown with a metallic-grey overcoat (it might be armor...or a straight-jacket), Ms. Tisato dances to the tumultuous opening music, played by Mr. LaNasa. The work was inspired by Joan of Arc's fate, though it has a more universal and contemporary feel. The dancer is possibly an on-the-verge patient in a mental hospital. Cellist Kirsten Jermé's lovely playing of Gurdjieff's *Woman's Prayer* brings a sense of calm, though anxiousness lurks below the surface. Ms. Tisato's veering between resistance and resignation is captured in the third movement; she struggles to remove her metallic garment, and finally collapses. Attendants cover her with a sheet, but once they depart, she rises and - again to Ms. Jermé playing Gurdjieff's *Armenian Song* - her ghostly spirit wanders, still not at peace. Ms. Tisato's powerful presence, and the artistry of the musicians, made a lasting impression.



Above: from Catherine Gallant's *Late Echo*; photo by Steven Pisano

Next we saw Catherine Gallant's *Late Echo*, a new work for five dancers commissioned by **Dances We Dance**. Set to composer James Ra's *Evocation* for cello and piano - vividly played by Kirsten Jermé (cello) and Mr. LaNasa (piano) - *Late Echo* was danced today by Colleen Edwards, Kathleen Caragine, and Rosy Gentle, with guest artists Amelia Dawe Sanders, and Rebecca Seow. Some curious and intriguing projections came into play.

Ms. Gallant is ever the thoughtful, imaginative choreographer, and she opens *Late Echo* with the dancers briefly stepping into the space one by one and quickly departing. Then luminous movement passages are seen, the dancers responding beautifully to the gorgeous music. In more animated passages, the dancers communicate with a gestural language; a sense of tenderness develops. In the end, one dancer is left alone. My only regret about *Late Echo* is that Ms. Gallant was not dancing in it herself.

A new solo, choreographed and danced by Francesca Todesco, was inspired by William Wordsworth's poem "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" from *Recollections of Early Childhood* and developed from the idea the poignant relentlessness of change. It is set to words from the Wordsworth poem and music by Scriabin, impeccably played by Mr. LaNasa.

Clad in black, Ms. Todesco's movement is rivetingly evocative - at first with a sense of aloneness and then with increasing restlessness. What has always lured me to Francesca's dancing is her deeply feminine spirit, her inner intensity, and her sure sense of the music. In *Intimations of Immortality* these elements combined in a personal *tour de force*.

These words from Wordsworth always leave me shaken, and nowadays - when the world seems poised on the edge of a knife - more than ever: "Whither is fled the visionary gleam? Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"



Above: from *Fuga Y Misterio*, photo by Steven Pisano

To close the program, in Francesca Todesco's *Fuga Y Misterio*, we find four women who seem to be lingering in an after-hours club, with the pianist (Mr. LaNasa) still at his keyboard. A program note reads: "inspired by the personal journey of women's artists throughout history, their courage, ambitions, strength and the beauty of their characters, but also their darkness and hardship."

Astor Piazzolla's music is always a sensual thrill to experience; Mr. LaNasa and Ms. Jermé polished off their evening with more superb playing, Ms. Jermé joining "live" a recorded 12-cello version of the closing piece. The dancers are Colleen Edwards, Kathleen Caragine, Rosy Gentle, and Margherita Tisato. Costumes by Ms. Todesco are mostly red or accented in red - joined later by Ms. Tisato in black - and the women wear stilettos.

The movement has a stylized quality. The women are beautiful, sensual, and proud, but also lonely and uncertain; as the work nears its end, they find consolation in their sisterhood. There is a burst of energy but the work ends with a quiet coda.

In a pre-pandemic lifetime, I was at one of Francesca's earliest classes with the women who would come to form **Dances We Dance**. It's so lovely to see all the months of her dedication and hard work blossoming with today's production.

~ Oberon

June 06, 2022 | [Permalink](#)