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Swiss ballet fusion debuts at Pillow

By TRESKA WEINSTEIN
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BECKET, Mass. - To write a review that truly encapsulated the talents of Switzerland's Ballet du Grand Theatre de Geneve, you'd have to speak half a dozen languages and be able to switch from one style to another on a dime. You'd have to be funny, passionate, clever, surprising and edgy, all within a few paragraphs. You'd have to know how to create beautiful, classical phrases as well as brand-new ways of expressing yourself.

This isn't that kind of review. But Ballet du Grand Theatre de Geneve is that kind of company.

The 22-member ensemble made its U.S. debut Wednesday at Jacob's Pillow, with two works, Saburo Teshigawara's "Para-Dice" and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's "Loin" (French for "Far"). Both pieces feature widely divergent moods and movement, emphasizing the sense that this incarnation of the 45-year-old company belongs less to Switzerland than it does to the world. Director Philippe Cohen, born in Morocco, studied with Merce Cunningham and at the School of American Ballet; Teshigawara is Japanese; Cherkaoui is Belgian with Moroccan and Flemish heritage; the dancers themselves are a markedly international group.

"Loin" plays up this fusion, with text spoken in English, Chinese and French, and draped, wrapped costumes with an Asian look. The masterful choreography spans multiple movement vocabularies, beginning with a striking series of complex, overlapping gestures of hands, wrists and arms, performed by 10 couples simultaneously, that recalls ancient yoga mudras. Other sections, notably an acrobatic pas de deux between Yanni Yin and Gregory Deltenre, approach contortionism balanced with a balletic clarity of line and softened by the dancers' chemistry and charisma.

Solos, duets and ensemble sections set to excerpts from Heinrich Biber's "Mystery" sonatas are interspersed with quirky stories told on stage by the dancers, who speak as one and accompany their words with gestures also done in unison. A trio in which the powerful Manuel Vignoulle leads and supports Andre Hamelin and Ilias Ziragachi through rolls, turns and falls - a parent guiding his children to take their first steps - is especially awesome.

"Para-Dice," set to a constantly shifting sound score by Willi Bopp, is as cool, pure and satisfying as a mathematical equation made up of a million separate calculations. Geometrical movement, with arms and legs swinging like

metronomes, segues into curving, melting shapes, then a fast-paced section, then a delicate and precise quartet marked by extensions and balances.

Another invisible transition, and now the dancers run and leap in lines that travel on and off the stage, moving with perfectly controlled abandon - like a carefully calibrated sentence that unspools effortlessly on the page.

Tresca Weinstein, a freelance writer from Canaan, is a regular contributor to the Times Union.

Ballet review **BALLET DU GRAND THEATRE DE GENEVE** When: 8 p.m.
Wednesday Where: Jacob's Pillow, 358 George Carter Road, Becket, Mass.
Program: "Para-Dice," "Loin" Length: 100 minutes, one intermission
Continues: 8 tonight through Saturday; 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday; \$52 Info:
(413) 243-0745 or <http://www.jacobspillow.org>