

April 5, 2007

DANCE REVIEW | BALLET MEMPHIS

Cupid's Arrows and Southern Hip-Hop Beats

By GIA KOURLAS

Ballet Memphis is something of a little engine that could, to perhaps sum up the imaginative grit of Dorothy Gunther Pugh, who has presided over the group with equal dashes of elegance and temerity for 20 years. On Tuesday night both ingredients were on display in a program of New York premieres at her company's Joyce Theater debut.

The first, by Trey McIntyre, is exceptional. When he's on his mark, Mr. McIntyre, the troupe's resident choreographer, embodies the breezy nature of a dreamer, albeit with his feet planted firmly on the ground. His joyful "Naughty Boy!" (2004), set to [Mozart's](#) Violin Concerto in G, focuses on the romantic antics of four couples and a Cupid, in the form of an especially enchanting Dawn Fay.

"The Naughty Boy!" begins with a curtain drawn across two-thirds of the stage and Cupid wearing a whimsical orange coonskin hat and a fitted plaid jacket. (Costume design is credited to Kirsty Munn and Liz Prince.) Suddenly colorful paper streamers fly through the air, paving the way for Ms. Fay to flee the stage, and she does, darting mischievously with a teasing smile.

Mr. McIntyre can move groups through space with ease, as he does in "The Naughty Boy!" But in the second movement, when the curtain is drawn back to reveal the full stage and the work's main couple, Crystal Brothers and Travis Bradley, he offers even more in intricate partnering.

Lifts, which show off Ms. Brothers's long feet and switchblade legs, are somehow both graceful and precarious; the dancers, for all their daring and attack, never surrender plasticity.