

The Boston Globe

- **Danish troupe is elegant and electric**

By Karen Campbell, Globe Correspondent | July 29, 2006

BECKET -- Tim Rushton's "Silent Steps" is one of those rare dances so packed with unmitigated charm that it's hard for a viewer to contain a grin and suppress an occasional chuckle of delight. It's that exuberant, that exhilarating. Presented Thursday night at Jacob's Pillow by the Danish Dance Theatre, it was one of two US premieres the superb 25-year-old company brought to the festival.

Set to movements from J.S. Bach's Harpsichord Concertos, the work is anything but silent. Bach's buoyant music sends the dancers flying on- and offstage, spinning like tops, corkscrewing midair, cavorting with high spirits. They lift, carry, push, and drag one another. Two women repeatedly fling themselves into the arms of two men. Weight is channeled into startlingly vivid shapes, then released with delicious abandon. It has the dynamic slide/pop contrast of jazz dance with none of the sexual innuendo.

However, despite the work's kinetic thrill and elegant fluidity, there is also a very deliberate, very human awkwardness that makes it all the more compelling. Legs that kick to the heavens in great arcs end with flexed feet bent inward. Arms jiggle and swing with rubbery looseness. Dancers crash to the floor, sliding, crawling, scooting, their torsos undulating in great waves. A fascinating gestural vocabulary looks like a dramatically expansive sign language.

Part of the work's great allure is the dancers themselves. They really look at one another and at the audience. There is an electric connection that is almost palpable.

Denmark's leading contemporary ensemble, the Copenhagen-based troupe (formerly known as New Danish Dance Theatre) attracts dancers from Europe's top ballet schools, and they are not just brilliant technicians but seasoned, highly personable performers. The Royal Ballet-trained Rushton, the company's artistic director since 2001, is building an impressive body of works that showcase the dancers' formidable talents.

The evening's other US premiere, "Kridt" (which means "chalk" in Danish), is the final in a three-part series of works exploring the intersection of movement and text. (The earlier "Shadowland" and "Graffiti" were presented during the company's American debut at the Pillow two years ago.) This intriguing work uses much the same movement vocabulary as "Silent Steps," but to radically different effect.

Set to a score of ardently straining strings by Peteris Vasks with interwoven texts from Ecclesiastes, "Kridt" has a highly theatrical yet somber tone. Beams of light pierce through a haze of smoke revealing "chalkboard" strips of text bisecting the stage side to side and pasted along the backdrop. Both contain quotes -- "a time to die, a time to be

born . . ." -- that the dancers, in their smudged gray costumes, gradually erase as they move.

A pervasive, poignant sense of dislocation and despair is epitomized by a fleeting connection between two dancers, one tracing the outline of another as he moves slowly against the back wall.

With its ponderous score, "Kridt" threatens to get mired in subterranean gloom until a brilliant light from above seems to open a hole in the ceiling, raining down a luminous stream of dust that bathes one of the dancers. At first, it seems an image of salvation. But then he collapses, seemingly lifeless. Another traces his outline on the floor, a fragile record of a transitory existence.■