

DANCE REVIEW

New works from Twyla Tharp

One, set to Bach, matched his wit and humor, but the other piece never took off completely.

By Nancy G. Heller
FOR THE INQUIRER

To celebrate a half-century of making dances, the much-honored Twyla Tharp is leading her troupe on a multi-city tour that features a pair of brand-new works. It just completed a run at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts.

The 12 magnificent performers range from Tharp regulars (notably John Selya, the star of her hit musical *Movin' Out*) to Reed Tankersley, a recent Juilliard graduate who is half Selya's age. But on Saturday night, they were all at ease with Tharp's signature combination of balletic grace and power with loose-limbed, casual-seeming gestures.

Preludes and Fugues is set to a recording of J.S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, with costumes by longtime Tharp collaborator Santo Loquasto: beige trousers and loose shirts for the men; for the women, dresses with short, full skirts, in autumnal colors.

As my theatergoing companion (a pianist) noted, Tharp's choreography is as complex as Bach's music, paralleling its wit, humor, and sense of courtliness. A man might bow and kiss his partner's hand,

then suddenly segue into pelvic circles and butt wiggles. This piece requires her dancers to switch — within a single phrase — from seductive and flowing to frisky and silly. Yet the highlight of *Preludes and Fugues* was an emotionally wrenching sequence in which Ron Todorowski seemed to be caught between two women who were oblivious to his existence.

Yowzie, Tharp's other new piece, includes a host of narratives. Wearing Loquasto's gloriously mismatched leggings, vests, and outrageous headgear, the dancers cavort to early jazz by Jelly Roll Morton. The main players, hardworking Rika Okamoto and the astonishing Matthew Dibble, fight and flirt when her character isn't lolling about in a drunken stupor. Meanwhile, Tankersley pursues the statuesque Kaitlyn Gilliland and Savannah Lowery, and the trio of Selya, Todorowski, and Amy Ruggiero reveal themselves to be gifted comedians.

Yet *Yowzie* never took off completely. Often, Okamoto seemed brittle rather than funny. Also, it wasn't clear whether *Yowzie*'s final segments were meant to serve as extended curtain calls. Awkward.



