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First Sounds of Spring

By Barrymore Laurence Scherer, March 27, 2013

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That night, I attended "Play & Play: An Evening of Movement and Music" by the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company at the Lucas Theatre for the Arts, a film palace elegantly decorated with neoclassical designs in the manner of Robert Adam and Josiah Wedgwood. On the first half was "Story," set to Franz Schubert's D-Minor String Quartet ("Death and the Maiden"); on the second was "D-Man in the Waters," set to Felix Mendelssohn's E-Flat String Octet, op.20.

Even on a rhythmic level, the choreography of both dances appeared to have little relationship to the romantic, emotional music. But whether you feel that Bill T. Jones ranks among America's most articulate exponents of modern dance, or that he simply talks a good game, his company—strong and attractive—danced with its own kind of panache. Musically the Dover Quartet, formed at the Curtis Institute in 2008, distinguished itself by playing Schubert with a level of nuance unexpected of musicians so young. And when the quartet was joined for the Mendelssohn by four equally youthful members of Ensemble39—two still studying at the Curtis—these eight musicians bespoke the level of artistry being fostered in that venerable Philadelphia conservatory.

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