

Asheville, NC, January 21, 2006: The [Asheville Ballet](#) billed its latest offering, seen January 21, as the "Winter Concert: New Ballet" and used the working title of "Bach, Blues, Ballet." There were four works, all premieres, each with a lineage of movement from the inventories of both formal ballet and modern dance. It was familiar territory, all around, yet still innovative and fresh. **Ann Dunn is responsible for that, and nearly everything else, as it turns out, and all the works represented her choreography. As Artistic Director she is a one-woman verb.**

The oldest work on the program was started in September of 2005. All were in some stage of evolution during the fall concert schedule, and all were well in progress during the annual holiday production of *The Nutcracker*. January provides the least daylight and is the darkest hour for "new" works. "New works don't attract audiences in the same way as *Nutcracker*," says Dunn, "where people already know the story and attend the concert as a community. New pieces have no heritage to attract." That said, the second night of the pair of performances had **a large and enthusiastic audience** in the Diana Wortham Theatre.

First up was *Café*, a jazz ballet choreographed by Dunn with original music by Patrick Boland. The stage revealed a sparse minimalist setting – chairs and cubes suggesting a café, with five female dancers in skirts and slippers and the lone male in pants and breezy open-collar shirt. Fairly conventional modern-style movements allowed the work to explore various themes including love, memories, hope, and losses. Boland played live at the piano, accompanied by Cameron Austin and Marc Yaxley. During the fifth movement, Peggy Ratusz joined on vocals. Angelina Favre, Allison Hertzberg, Amy Kohler, Lyle Laney, Sarah McGinnis, and Amy Strickland combined to complete **a scene of hip disaffection and loose structure with outstanding solo and ensemble dancing.**

Lusciously, a sensuous a pas de deux, came next. Danced by Hertzberg and Laney to recorded music of Stephanie's Id, this work, set against a pale background sheet with dancers in tights, was easily more provocative. The old party game of *Twister!* came to mind during some of the shapes created. It was **brilliantly danced and elegantly choreographed.**

Yellow Rose followed intermission and set up **a new dynamic for the eye.** Here McGinnis performed a series of monologue movements interspersed between images projected against the rear stage. Set in total silence, images by local nature artist Tim Lewis appeared and a series of movements accompanied, all at seven-second intervals. This timing **forced audience attention** span in ways mere suggestion would never cause. There was total silence in the hall, McGinnis performed with a minimum of ancillary noises (foot sounds, breathing), and the final extended series of movements produced **a speeding coda of anticipation.** To quote Dunn, this is "a duet dialogue between the visual and movement artists." It was successful on all fronts.

This concert ended with *Bach*, a neo-classical ballet featuring techniques and costumes more common to traditional ballet. It is in four movements, corresponding to the four movements of J. S. Bach's Violin Sonata No. 1, in G minor (S.1001), performed live by Corine Brouwer. One measure of this group's capacity is programming such demanding live music while dancers are whirling en pointe. Hertzberg, Kohler, and McGinnis shared the workload; Kohler was joined by Ralph Jacques, guesting from Atlanta, for a duet during the Siciliana movement. Timing is everything, and Brouwer told me afterward the dancers had rehearsed to a recording by Itzhak Perlman. "Of course he played it pretty fast, so I had to really work at it!" If speed, or tempo, were the only issue there would be nothing to talk about. But keep in mind this work includes one of the more demanding fugues in the repertoire. Her realization was memorable, barking baseline and all, and there was **great ensemble dancing**, too.

Throughout this program, on-stage movements and general attitude constantly reminded me of some of the pioneering names in modern dance – names like Cunningham, Taylor, José Limón, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, and Margaret Craske, who lived across the street from my childhood home. Of course, Graham and Duncan always come to mind, and while that's a long way back we should remember and thank them for propelling us this far, I suppose. All this is to say that Dunn has direct lineage to these roots in both her training and professional experience, and she has brought the full import of those creative forces to bear in Asheville. This company opened the season with a rock ballet, then staged a traditional holiday ballet production, we've just had four premieres with feet planted in both traditional ballet and modern technique, and in May they will stage *The Firebird*.

In this business, you must deliver to stay alive. This company is fit and well-trained, and it is thriving in creative riches too numerous to mention. We have Ann Dunn to hold responsible for it, and I advise you to go see Asheville Ballet productions as soon as possible. You will become hooked.