

Dance

Night of 100 Solos marked Merce Cunningham's centenary at BAM, New York

The dancers came from outside the ranks of company veterans — and broke the choreographer's mould of a tall, lean, ribless WASP





Chalvar Monteiro (left) and Sara Mearns © Stephanie Berger

Apollinaire Scherr APRIL 18, 2019

The Merce Cunningham people know how to throw a party. The company staged its final show, in 2011, on New Year's Eve in Manhattan's biggest space, the Park Avenue Armory. Now, for the late master's centenary, 75 dancers took over stages in three time zones, from London to Los Angeles, in *Night of 100 Solos*.

The dancers for the New York chapter of this mega-“Event” not only fell outside the ranks of company veterans but also broke the Cunningham mould of a tall, lean, ribless WASP. As if to underscore this welcome development, the unitards designed by Reid & Harriet branched out from primary colours to indigo, lilac, peach, ochre and sky blue.

Culling from a half century of repertory, stagers Patricia Lent and Jean Freebury matched solos to dancers in ways obvious (tasking Ailey virtuosos Chalvar Monteiro and Jacquelin Harris with extreme technical feats) and subtle (giving the sculpturally riveting Tamisha Guy a solo of shifting facets).

The curtain rose to reveal White Oak veteran Keith Sabado carving space with his limbs while Martha Graham star PeiJu Chien-Pott curved her back as if throwing down a gauntlet made of lead. *Night* soon grew crowded, with much loping and skittering, and dancers popping in to perform simultaneous solos. On one leg for a long spell, New York City Ballet's Sara Mearns used her free leg to guide her back into a curve, with the arms bevelling like steel wings and straightening like scissors.

These solos made room for every possible impulse, violent and smooth: for Reid Bartelme's mad king and Shayla-Vie Jenkins' serene queen. With painter Pat Steir's "waterfalls" as backdrop and musician John King leading a crew that made music as mercurial as weather, *Night of 100 Solos* let us settle in and dwell. What a place.

★★★★★

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