



## **Flash Review 1, 5-10: Table the Chairs!**

### **Preljocaj Brings it Home on Paris Opera Ballet...Again et Again**

By Aimée Ts'ao

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SAN FRANCISCO -- Despite having heard a less than glowing report from our own PBI (Paul Ben-Itzak) about "Le Parc," choreographed by Angelin Preljocaj for the Paris Opera Ballet in 1994, I went to the War Memorial Opera House last Friday with a certain optimism. I am a Preljocaj fan. I loved his "Romeo and Juliet," danced here in Berkeley by the Lyon Opera Ballet in 1995, and his Homage aux Ballets Russe ("Spectre de la Rose" and "Les Nocces") performed by his own company two years ago at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Theater. I did, however, have mixed feelings about "Le Paysage apres la Bataille," seen a few months ago, though I found some sections of it quite beautiful and evocative.

My main complaint, and it is a major one, is that "Le Parc" is twice as long as it needs to be, especially irritating since there is no intermission. I am perfectly capable of sitting through an hour and a half of anything that is engaging, that constantly provokes and throws my mind off balance. But Preljocaj, for some inexplicable reason, assumes that the audience lacks that ability to understand his choreography without his drilling it so deeply into their heads that the net effect is that of having had a lobotomy. One is left completely numbed. I often found myself thinking, "Okay, enough already, I got it the first time." Instead, why doesn't he develop the material in an unexpected direction, or carefully lead me to have some expectations about where we're going and then suddenly veer off course? And many portions of it are cliché and corny, though as a friend pointed out, love, the subject of this ballet, is, after all, sometimes corny. So I guess that makes it appropriate in a certain sense. The cliché part is inexcusable for such an experienced choreographer. How many more times in my life as a dance critic will I have to sit through a piece using chairs? Pina Bausch did it brilliantly in "Nelken," but the partnering prop has been mined to the point that the erosion on the choreographic mountain leaves a mere molehill.

To Preljocaj's credit, however, there are a few sections of exquisite beauty. The pas de deux at the end of the third act left me deeply moved and artistically satisfied. And in spite of the extreme length of the piece, I found the formalism of structure exactly right for the concept, an exploration of the nature of love based on 17th and 18th century literature. The overall aesthetic is magnificent. The combination of the decor by Thierry

Leproust, costumes by Herve Pierre and lighting by Jacques Chatelet created an atmosphere of true harmony on several levels. First simply as a feast for the eyes and then as a contrasting background for the less than perfect human emotions that lie beneath the surface.

The corps de ballet dancers looked far more at ease than in "La Bayadere," and I found Manuel Legris as compelling as he had been in the classical piece. I wonder if the POB has any other strong male stars. Legris appeared in five of the seven performances here, though the women rotated quite a bit in the principal roles for 'Bayadere.'

Certain friends and colleagues loved "Le Parc," so I will not say that you should stay away. I would even probably sit through it again to see the high points and savor the visual and musical aspects. And I would say that you could sneak in to see the last act except that there isn't an intermission to make that possible.