

Zydeco Spices Up a Strait-Laced Show

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Why doesn't every choreographer work with a live zydeco band? The question came to mind while listening to Jeffery Broussard & the Creole Cowboys, who accompanied Elisa Monte Dance in "Zydeco, Zaré," which had its New York premiere at the Joyce Theater on Wednesday.

And yet. Mr. Broussard and his Cowboys are fabulous: You start moving in your seat as soon as their rhythmic, rich melodies, both joyous and mournful, flood the theater. But for the most part this band, with its inescapable voice, didn't do Ms. Monte's choreography any favors, despite inspiring some of the liveliest performances of the night from such fine dancers as Daquan Thompson, Maya Taylor, Clement Mensah and India Bolds. Instead, it highlighted just how polite and predictable an artist Ms. Monte is.

I don't think this was always the case. The revival of a 1984 work, "Audentity," set to a relentless Klaus Schulze score, shows a more particularly minimalist choreographic mind at work. The dancers here are like futuristic intergalactic ambassadors, striding and lunging tirelessly along a diagonal strip of white flooring, executing calm balances while their raised legs hinge and rotate. They come in peace, these fierce beings. But don't mess with them.

There isn't much to mess with in works like the structurally slight "Slope of Enlightenment" from 2007, or "Arrow's Path," a fussy, overwrought premiere for two couples and a lone man (Joe Celej on Wednesday) who kept interrupting their grappling. Program notes described "an intertwining and juxtaposition" of relationships, but it was hard to discern any sort of community here; the dancers seemed to interact mainly to facilitate ostentatious partnering maneuvers.

"Zydeco, Zaré" certainly has more life in it, especially when Ms. Monte relaxes and lets her dancers have a bit of fun in the final social dance section. Still, the eyes, following the ears, traveled again and again to those Creole Cowboys. Accompaniment or no, they were the main draw.

Elisa Monte Dance performs through Sunday at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue at 19th Street; (212) 242-0800, joyce.org

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