

# Living Arts

THE BOSTON GLOBE SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 2003

## Jose Mateo scores with classical 'New Dances'

By Christine Temin  
GLOBE STAFF

Some choreographers shy away from classical music's greatest hits, fearing their ballets might be overshadowed by the scores. Jose Mateo has never been among their number.

In his current program, "New Dances," he tackles Bach, Haydn, and Ravel — all considered fair game for dance — and Wagner, who isn't.

Only two of the four dances are actually new, and the Wagner piece, "Windborne," isn't one of them, having premiered last year. Set to the overture from "Tannhauser," it's the only work that seems too bombastic for the handsomely converted nave of a Cambridge church, a space on which Mateo holds a 41-year lease, making his organization one of the most stable in town in terms of real estate.

His dancers finally seem comfortable in the unconventional quarters they've now occupied for a couple of seasons. So does the audience, seated at little tables sipping champagne from the Barre Bar. The programming flaw this time around is a certain sameness: All four works are group pieces that occasionally allow soloists to break through; all four are lyrical, deferential echoes of the music. Mateo is to be admired for choosing important scores, but, given the intimacy of his operation, wouldn't it be nice to have live music, even if it's a trio instead

### New Dances

Performed by Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre  
At: Sanctuary Theatre,  
Harvard Square, Cambridge, last night  
(repeats through April 13)

"Back to Bach," the opener, is in an astringent, Euclidean mode a la Balanchine. The score is the Piano Concerto in G Minor; the shapes include women wilting to the floor like dying blooms. The Wagner piece is structured around dancers on long diagonals, looking as though they're embarking on a pilgrimage. But they're crushed by the heavy music.

"Courtly Lovers," set to Haydn's "The Surprise Symphony," is, unsurprisingly flighty and flirtatious. Meg Flaherty, a Mateo veteran, and Cosmin Marculetiu, a newcomer, are the principals in a fluid ballet that gracefully incorporates a snippet of ballroom dance and an episode when men examine the women as if they were beauty pageant contestants. Mateo never lingers in the humor department, which keeps the work lighthearted and nicely paced.

"Reverie," set to Ravel's Piano Concerto in G, is high-speed hijinks, expertly danced by a cast led by Elizabeth Scherban Shinzawa and Parren Ballard. Ballard, another newcomer, sets a whimsical tone at the beginning, playing a muscle-bound guy in shorts who looks as though he's missed the turnoff for Gold's Gym. The tone

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## ARTS REVIEWS

### Mateo's program a delight, but flawed by lack of variety

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That said, this program is a delight. Both Mateo's dancers and his dances improve every time out, and they were not starting from a low level. "Back to Bach," the opener, is in an astringent, Euclidean mode, a la Balanchine. The score is the Piano Concerto in G

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looks as though he's missed the turnoff for Gold's Gym. The tone grows somber soon, as Ballard and Shinzawa engage in a buttery, slow-motion duet that demonstrates Mateo's facility in design-

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