



# THE PLAIN DEALER

## DANCE

### Verb program shows versatility, dash of daffiness

Monday, July 23, 2007

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**Plain Dealer Dance Critic**

Verb Ballets has a disarming way of traveling from choreographic soup to nuts. The Cleveland dance company's program Friday at Cain Park's Evans Amphitheater was a case in point.

From artistic director Hernando Cortez's "Planet Soup," the troupe moved to Heinz Poll's "Bolero" and duet from "Wings and Aires" to Cortez's newest (and daffiest) work, "Polka Madness."

The night had an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink aura, mostly to pleasurable effect.

"Polka Madness" unleashes the goofy in Verb. Cortez's settings of polka tunes find the cast dressed in folksy costumes, including lederhosen for the men, evoking the romantic looniness and inebriated jollity that distinguish this most unbuttoned of dance forms.

The girls fight over the men and throw kisses. The cast occasionally becomes tipsy. Cortez's whimsy reaches its peak in "Who Stole the Keeshka?," with Mark Tomasic wielding a meat cleaver. At the ballet's end, dancers spill out into the crowd to persuade audience members to do their polka thing.

Much of "Polka Madness" is a silly delight, though so much music in the same tempo leads to polka monotony. The cast appeared to relish the activity, and the Johnny Koenig Orchestra provided plenty of polka exuberance from the pit, some unsettled harmonies aside.

Cortez's "Planet Soup" ladles on numerous international styles with exotic confidence. The juxtaposition of dance ideas is surprising, as when ritualistic gestures from India and Africa give way to Celtic vigor. Beautifully costumed and lushly danced, the piece has bountiful personality, if also a few too many ingredients to sustain interest.

Like several other Ohio dance companies, Verb Ballets will take part in a summer festival in Akron parks in August celebrating the late Heinz Poll, founding artistic director of Ohio Ballet. Verb is doing its part to keep the choreographer's flame ablaze, as its performances Friday of two Poll pieces confirmed.

It's too bad we only saw the second movement from "Wings and Aires," Poll's lighter-than-air ballet set to Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 4. But Tomasic and Catherine Meredith floated stylishly through the pas de deux.

Meredith also was wonderful as the central figure in Poll's "Bolero," a masterful treatment of Ravel's famous orchestral crescendo. The work begins with a sole dancer in black lifting thumbs, tilting hips and rising and falling on the balls and heels of her feet.

As the music builds, the piece adds dancers and choreographic flourishes, with the heroine and then her colleagues whipping capes like impassioned matadors. It is a dazzling achievement that Verb danced to the frenzied hilt.

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