

DANCE REVIEW

'Movements' is so innovative, it sings

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"Underground Movements," Frank Chaves' new work for River North Chicago Dance Company, is a complex, striking spectacle, both a plunge into fresh waters and a dense, dreamy performance piece for the troupe.

Evan Solot's harmonic score blends the plinks and echoes of an underground cavern with sonorous vocal work performed live over the weekend by the Chicago Children's Choir during River North's outing at the Harris Theater.

Onstage choral groups typically bedevil choreographers and seem awkward standbys to the dancers. Not here. Chaves cagily uses these beguiling singers as sly participants in his visual fantasy. They merge in and out of the background as haunting spectators, witnesses to the strange, spooky, silky undertakings, the choreographic equivalent of a participatory Greek chorus.

The ensemble work, evoking a tribal ritual enacted in a primordial bog, is a tad inconsistent, but often gorgeous and always startling and intense. Early on, a series of unsettling trios involves two men supporting a woman between them, almost as a human swing or gymnastic device, an unsettling image that helps establish the unearthly aura. A late solo, though beautifully danced by Brittany Blumer, and an impressive finale both go on a bit long and could use some fine-tuning.

But an ensemble section in the middle of the piece is truly breathtaking, fueled by Chaves' exuberant, repeated use of backward running and a brightly colored catalog of subtle, inventive gestures. "Underground Movements," unveiled last fall in a private performance, represents a new level of ambition for Chaves and the troupe, an impressive collaboration, and that includes the eerie, watery world evoked by Jackson Lowell's costumes and Christopher Ash's hypnotic set and lighting design.

In a busy weekend for dance, Thodos Dance Chicago offered the premiere of "Rossini Recess," by the renowned Ann Reinking, at the Harold Washington Library. Far better than Reinking's last offering for the troupe, "Rossini" is a frolicsome satire featuring a horde of playground acrobats acting as if they're inventing the art. Using trampolines and Frisbees, they puncture the oh-so-serious dance balloon.

To wit: a woman positions herself as if about to deliver a round of grueling diva fouettes, but breaks out instead into a short-lived, sexy wriggle.

Fun, light and negligible, owing at least a smidgen of debt to David Parsons, the enjoyable work is nevertheless further proof that Gioachino Rossini is the best thing ever to happen to dance self-mockery.