

The Royal Ballet fielded three casts for the Boston engagement of *Manon*. While each was interesting in its own right, one proved head and shoulders above the rest. Zenaïda Yanowsky — relatively new to the role of Manon — and her partner Kenneth Greve were outstanding at creating the sort of chemistry that made Lynne Seymour and Rudolf Nureyev thrilling in these dramatic roles.

Yanowsky is, in fact, one of the few dancers tackling this role today who is capable of suggesting the conflicted emotions of a woman torn between lust for jewels and money, and love for Des Grieux. She suggests brilliantly the inner drama that drives this very human character. When Monsieur G.M. clasps a choker of diamonds about her elegant neck, she shivers with a frisson of lust for the wealth and power it suggests. Somehow Yanowsky suggests sweetness and danger all rolled into one. Yanowsky combines strength and weakness in one body. She gives a performance of wonderful daring, desperate risk taking.

Tamara Rojo and Alina Cojocaru may dance the role more expertly, but they haven't anything like the dramatic power Yanowsky unleashes. Kenneth Greve is a perfect partner for Yanowsky's desperate passion. He may not be as elegant as Johan Kobborg, nor as athletically thrilling as Carlos Acosta, but when he stretches his leg in arabesque it is from some point of yearning, not just a romantic step that is technically precise but empty of feeling.

None of the dancers who came to Boston managed to create a believable Lescault. Thiago Soares came close, but like Viacheslav Samodurov and Jose Martin, he didn't have the sense of dark treachery that Anthony Dowell and David Wall used to bring to this role.

Genesia Rosato and Elizabeth McGorian were both delicious as Madam, recalling the glory days of Gerd Larsen and Rosalind Eyre who danced this part to perfection.

Overall, the 75-year-old Royal Ballet looked in great form under Artistic Director Monica Mason. Mason worked closely with MacMillan and knew him as well as anyone. Not all of the 3,600 Wang Centre seats were full at each performance, but the audience cheered long and loud for this great company celebrating 75 years of dance.

Gary Smith

Houston

Not since Fred Astaire graced the silver screen has choreography been so intimately entwined with furniture. Petr



Zuska's *Les Bras de Mer*, presented at Houston's annual Dance Salad Festival, April 13-15 at the Wortham Centre's Cullen Theatre, married a simple straight-back chair and table into a complicated emotional duet for Silja Schandorff and Jean-Lucien Massot of the Royal Danish Ballet. The duo, in simple, muted clothing, used the two pieces of furniture less as props and more as partners in their emotional depiction of a troubled relationship. It was one of the more moving of the international presentations staged over three nights and almost 10 hours.

There was no single theme to the 11th annual Houston contemporary festival this year, with 11 different companies coming from seven different countries, all curated by producer Nancy Henderek. Instead of a salad, it was more a buffet of tastes from several different cultures. There were dances presented from China, Europe and America, ranging from classical and contemporary ballet to post-modern movement. The Chinese, particularly, chose dramatic ensemble pieces to show, while the Dutch National Ballet sent three superbly danced duets, two of which were preceded by short, amusing films.

Morning Ground, David Dawson's delicate pas de deux between the lovely and lithe Yumiko Takeshima and Cedric Ygnace, followed a charming short film, *To the Point*, by Altin Kaftira — showing how Freed puts the pointe shoes together and then how Takeshima takes them apart before wearing. The same filmmaker produced a short on romance in the rehearsal studio that served as the opening act for *The Man I Love* from George Balanchine's *Who Cares?*, a suite of dances to George Gershwin songs.

Igone de Jongh and filmmaker and dancer Kaftira starred in both the short and the following duet set to a rousing rendition of the popular Gershwin tune.

Both were expertly and elegantly performed by the Dutch dancers.

Guangdong Modern Dance Company also used film, a computer-generated animated look at calligraphy, in its ensemble piece *Upon Calligraphy* by Liu Qi. The dance was evocatively brought to life with the supple and controlled power of the Chinese dancers. Beijing Modern Dance Company, on the other hand, used explosive steps and red scarves for dramatic effect in the big and booming *All River Red* by Li Han-zhong and Ma Bo set to a crashing Igor Stravinsky score.

The Europeans mostly eschewed drama in favour of cutting-edge dance theatre such as Ballet der Staatsoper Hannover's *Thundering Silence* with its canopy of hanging Magritte umbrellas and black-corseted women flying and scooping through an abstract work by Stephan Thoss. Their freewheeling movement and hand fluttering, despite the avant-garde trappings, perfectly matched the music by Antonio Vivaldi and Alessandro Marcello.

Göteborgs Operans Ballet danced sections from American choreographer Nicolo Fonte's *Re: Tchaikovsky*, a powerful yet lyrical examination of a composer's life and emotional turmoil. The piece contained a particularly beautiful pas de deux for two males.

Trey McIntyre's pick-up company showed excerpts from his quirky and very amusing *Chasing Squirrel*. Dancers en pointe with cartoon hairstyles enticed men in red pants and suspenders, in a rousing pursuit of love between the sexes. Effortless partnering and a sheer delight in the steps charmed the audience like a Bugs Bunny ballet.

Maurice Béjart's *La Barre* also used humour in a loving and brilliant tribute to the life of dancers. To the strains of Johann Strauss and the running commentary of an instructor, the immensely talented William Pedro of Béjart Ballet Lausanne addressed his barre with a Chaplin-esque wave before commencing his pliés and ports de bras. The barre — "the barre is alive" — was held by a black-clad dancer and moved to its own choreography. From the barre to the mirror to the floor, this short piece explored the daily work of a ballet dancer. And, although there were comic antics incorporated, Pedro was a masterful dancer exploding onto the floor in elevated leaps with a suppleness and spring that belied the ease of his huge grin. Like Charlie Chaplin on film, it takes great talent and training to play the clown in dance, and Pedro was the clown prince, articulating right down to his toes.

Marene Gustin