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The Trocks' Deadly Serious Spoofing

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It's a new year. The Aileys and the Nutcrackers have come and gone, and so, alas, have Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo—the Trocks, to their friends. They recently spent almost three weeks at the Joyce, and it wasn't enough. It's never enough.

No company has evolved more conspicuously than this group of male dancers in and out of ballet drag. Back at the beginning, in 1974, the joke lay in watching guys clonk around in tutus and toe shoes, parodying (broadly) well-known dance works and making fun of old-time Ballets Russes mannerisms. No more. The same old gags are still in play—the pratfalls, the collisions, the sneaky acts of sabotage, the blindingly blond wigs of the danseurs nobles, the molting feathers of the Dying Swan. But the level of dancing is now so high that we're less and less inclined to laugh and more and more likely to ponder the ambiguities of a male dancer who can actually be convincing as Odette, Giselle, Paquita. Robert Carter (nom de ballerina: Olga Supphozova) is not only technically brilliant—Fonteyn and Makarova would have coughed up fortunes for his/her fouettés—but commands a musicality and port de bras that are deeply womanly. He makes jokes because they're in the choreography, but in no way is he a joke.

Carter is a highly developed artist, but his colleagues are hardly slouches. He may be the central girl in Paquita, but the five guys who perform the other Petipa variations (or their variations of the variations) all have the technique, the control, the style. And no wonder—they've been coached in Paquita by one of our leading authorities on the Russian classical style, Elena Kunikova. The dancers obviously devour (and respect) her knowledge. They may be funny, but they're deadly serious about what they do.

Another Russian expert, Yelena Tchernychova, has staged the Trocks' new Giselle (Act II) very efficiently. The dancing is strong throughout, and some of the jokes come off—Albrecht (Albert here) gleefully joining Giselle in her coffin; all that business with the lilies!—but Giselle isn't really parody material. It's the quintessential ballet of the Romantic period, and the Romantic style doesn't easily lend itself to spoofing. So one finds oneself less interested in the Trocks' take on this great work and more interested in how well the dancers are handling their roles. The Trocks' Paquita, their Esmeralda, their Don Quixote tell us something about those ballets. Their Giselle tells us more about men as Wilis.

Of all the Trockadero works, the most famous (and rightly so) is Peter Anastos' Go for Barocco, his brilliant parody of Balanchine's great Concerto Barocco. But is it a parody? Perhaps an homage? Even a reinterpretation? Certainly, it's not a carbon copy. The obligatory jokes are there, all right, but so is a deep understanding and appreciation of Balanchine's genius. Even if you'd never seen the original, you could infer its greatness from what Anastos has done with—or to?—it. What's so remarkable is that with the passing of years, the dancing has grown so much more Balanchinian. That's why today it seems less like a gag-filled romp and more like a real Balanchine performance gone wonderfully wrong.

Apart from the obvious charm and wit of what they do, the Trocks have two immense advantages. One is the rock-solid coaching they're given, allowing them to be convincingly cuckoo in so many different styles. (This is why I go on hoping they'll take on Ailey. Where is Peter Anastos now that we need him?) Second is the obvious love of dancing that the whole company displays. No disaffected corps members here, no superannuated principals. The Trocks love what they do every bit as much as we do.