

**A**T A TIME WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE prefer E-mail to the human voice on the telephone, it is not surprising that choreographers and dancers are communicating with the public in new ways. This past season the New York City Ballet dancers, surpassing their customary brilliance, dazzled with fresh daring and bold technique. Speed and complexity, synonymous with the computer age, were especially visible in both the company's performances and its new choreography. No other comparable troupe has so consistently mirrored its time, beginning in the late 1940's with George Balanchine's futuristic works to modern music and Jerome Robbins's studies in urban alienation.

Peter Martins, the City Ballet's present artistic director, remains Balanchine's truest disciple. He has run the company on the premise that the classical vocabulary, increasingly contested in other troupes, is not open to question and that it can, indeed, be modernized through creativity.

The most symbolic affirmation of this faith was embodied in "Reliquary," the season's major premiere, in which Mr. Martins

**With 'Reliquary,' a major premiere by**

**Peter Martins, City**

**Ballet keeps abreast**

**of the new age while**

**retaining a classical**

**vocabulary.**

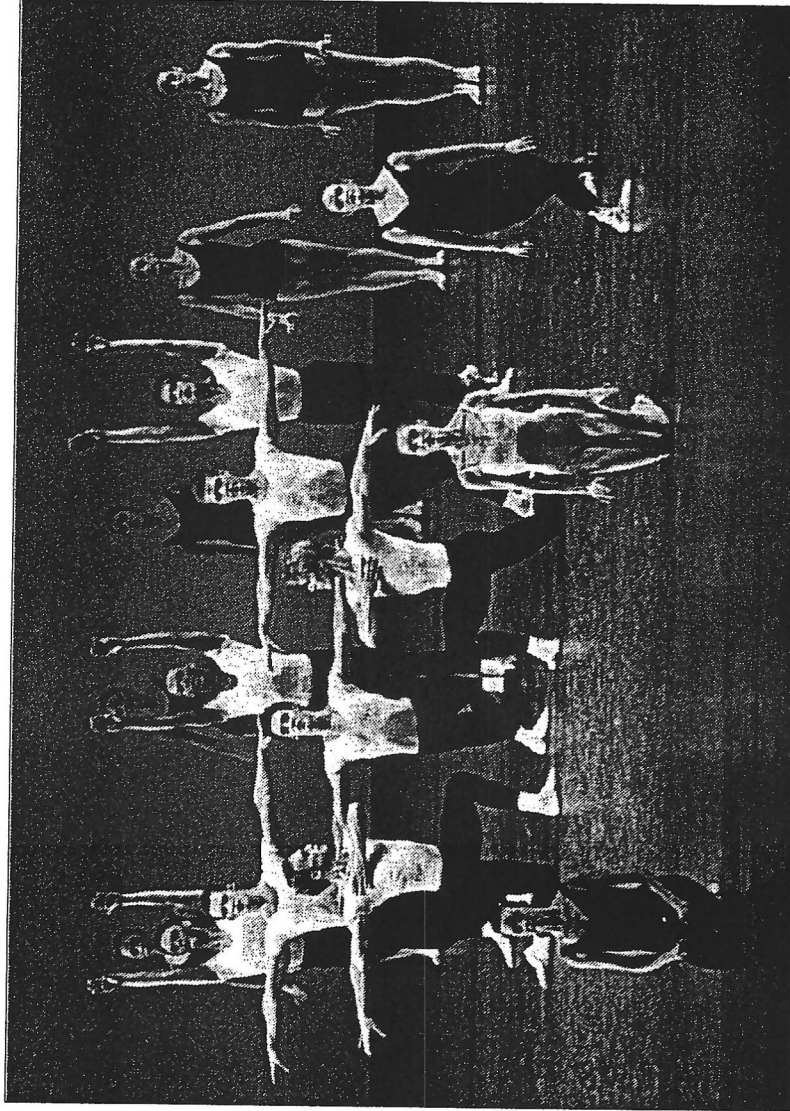
played Balanchine to Charles Wuorinen's Stravinsky. The music, composed in 1975, is based on notations by Stravinsky that Mr. Wuorinen used for a score that is very much his own.

A large work for 25 dancers (including two lead couples), "Reliquary" is more than a pseudo-Balanchine-Stravinsky ballet. Mr. Wuorinen may have chosen to compose in Stravinsky's late style, and Mr. Martins quotes liberally from Balanchine's ballets to the music of Stravinsky and other modernists. Nonetheless, these allusions to Balanchine's images are often askew here, presented with reversals of steps or directions.

Judged as form rather than as a game (spot the Balanchine quote), "Reliquary" has an admirable power in its ensembles; its invention grows organically out of an intricate and changing structure. Margaret Tracey and Peter Boat took wonderfully to the tosses and tautness of the second movement's pas de deux, while the third movement began with Wendy Whelan and Nilsa Martins in a more sinuous duet.

## DANCE VIEW/Anna Kisseleff

# In Pàce With Its Time: Fast, Complex, Like a Computer



Paul Kobnik/New York City Ballet  
City Ballet dancers in Peter Martins's "Reliquary"—Mr. Martins plays Balanchine to Charles Wuorinen's Stravinsky.

For all their human interaction, one can see why Martins works like "Reliquary" strike some as being too cerebral for their own good. Yet the contemporary composers whom Mr. Martins favors for such ballets—Michael Torke, John Adams, Mr. Wuorinen—are not interested in a sustained melodic line. What Mr. Martins hears in their post-tonal or post-minimalist music is not a conventional danciness but echoes of our pulsive age. More than other ballet choreographers, he has pioneered a use of phenom-

enal speed in classical technique that extends that technique and says something about the world in which we live.

It takes a certain kind of dancer to shape energy into form the way the City Ballet did so startlingly throughout the season. David Parsons, a modern-dance choreographer invited to create a premiere for the company, rightly assumed that his City Ballet cast would adapt to the bouncy momentum of his choreography.

"Touch," the piece he choreographed to a

score by Richard Peaslee, is performed in jazz shoes by four men and four women and could look at home in Mr. Parsons's modern-dance troupe. Yet there is an edge that classical dancers bring to hybrid movement that makes for extra clarity and precision. Edward Liang and Monique Meunier executed the work's odd leaps with spectacular spring.

Along the way, Mr. Parsons attempts, without any great depth, to examine different kinds of relationships. "Touch," whose

score has the aura of a soundtrack, succeeds mainly as a showcase for stamina and endurance, and excites the audience accordingly.

Kevin O'Day used the same qualities more subtly in the season's other premiere: His "Dvorak Bagatelles" was given a single performance at a gala. Mr. O'Day's forte is combining the same dancers in new ways, and he knows what classical partnering is about. But like Mr. Parsons, he tends mainly to display dancers and movement and then stop short of any meaningful conclusion.

There could be no reservations, however, about the impact of the company's dancing throughout the season. When the best seems startlingly bettered, there may be several explanations. One is that Mr. Martins himself now teaches the dancers more often than in the past (the fact that Mikhail Baryshnikov occasionally trains in these classes testifies to their level). The City Ballet is also a more youthful company this year, with a major turnover in the corps.

One result has been that distinctive dancing can be spotted at all levels. Elena Diner's soaring leaps in the back of the corps do not go unnoticed. The company's new kind of male dancer, the noble athlete, is embodied in performers as different as James Fayette and Mr. Liang. That Cara Copeland, 17, could handle the tricky permutations of Heather Watts's role in Mr. Martins's "Calcutum Light Night" was considered par for the course. That Jennie Somogyi, also in the corps, should show such stunning breadth in principal roles is testimony to her enormous talent. Miranda Weese, the company's newest principal, is also its bright young star.

Yet every so often, even the most reliable veterans can make a breakthrough. The season belonged above all to Nichol Hlinka, who danced sensationally from the moment she pierced the air with her first ultra-high pas de chat volé in "Donizetti Variations" to the "Coppélia" she infused with sheer dance power.

**R**ACING TOWARD THE MILLENNIUM, the City Ballet was brought up short by the death of Lincoln Kirstein, who founded the company with Balanchine in 1948. An unworthy tribute to him at the New York State Theater consisted, with very few exceptions, of people talking about themselves. That was the price Kirstein paid for courting those he needed for his various causes. They assumed they knew him well. But as Philip Johnson, the theater's architect, noted, he had heard nothing said about Kirstein's mind.

The dancing, made up of excerpts, saved the day and ended aptly with the apotheosis of the Balanchine-Stravinsky "Orpheus." In the last image, Isarumi Noguchi's sculpted lyre, entwined in a vine, rises to the sky, a symbol of art eternal.