



On Justin Peck's *In Creases*

By Sascha Radetsky

When I hear that Justin Peck likes to sketch out his choreographic ideas on notebooks before heading into the studio, I imagine a mad physicist holed up in his study at 2am, breathlessly laboring at equations, desperate to unlock the riddles of space and time.

Maybe it is not so absurd an association. Maybe if Einstein or Newton had seen *In Creases*, they would have sensed in Peck a kindred curiosity about the universe and its forces. "If all eight dancers took on various levels of magnetic energy," the choreographer says, musing on his ballet's themes, "how would it influence the group's general pull?" The title *In Creases*, he explains, refers not just to the swelling Philip Glass score but to an effort "to divide, to fold, to crease the stage space." The effects he creates throughout the ballet indeed evoke origami precision, and yet the atmosphere feels unstable, explosive; Peck's levels of magnetic energy are cranked high. Dancers thread, often at warp speed, in and out of geometric patterns, bond into pairs, trios, or clusters. Here they rush toward a soloist, whirl a while in orbit, then disperse like a spray of meteors. There they slot into a wedged phalanx, arms spearing outward, and stalk across the stage to ominously descending music. The soloist arches backward before their advance, then snaps erect as they retreat, her spine a bow drawn and released. Moments

later, three women roll a figure downstage, birthing a cyclone, a whipping, bounding force of nature that flashes in and out of action over the course of the ballet.

Two pianos, overlapping broadside like dueling battleships, anchor the rear of the stage. The sounds launched from their decks make you want to move. “I was skeptical about using [Philip Glass’s] music at first,” Peck says, “because everyone has used it. But ultimately it came down to the fact that it’s very good danceable music...” He notes that the composition “has subtle romantic undertones.” The ballet’s duets are feverish, suggesting the choreographer hears romance of the turbulent type. A featured couple hurtles and spirals like birds mating midair. At one point, the woman thrusts out her arms and a leg horizontally while the man spins her within a ring of dancers, who buckle, one by one, as if felled by a scythe. These are dangerous liaisons.

Peck describes the score (taken from *Four Movements for Two Pianos*, composed in 2008) as “propulsive.” Like much of Glass’s work, this drive—this refusal to idle or rest—sets an entrancing mood, deepened by Peck and Marc Happel’s sleek, monochrome costumes and a pale scrim that floats behind the pianos, waxing and waning through phases of shadow. The curtain falls after just fourteen minutes, but the mood lingers. So too does a sense that something has been discovered. *In Creases* does not reimagine relativity nor redraw the laws of motion. But in the universe of contemporary ballet, it could be a new world.

## Bibliography

Rogoff, Jay. NYCB Dancer to Perform World Premiere at SPAC. The Saratogian. July 7, 2012.

Harss, Marina. Interview: Justin Peck—New York City Ballet—Dancer and Choreographer. DanceTabs. September 27, 2012.