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DANCE REVIEW

Armitage troupe blends genres with authority

By Sid Smith
TRIBUNE CRITIC

Karole Armitage says she was attracted to composer Gyorgy Ligeti “not only for his mixture of classicism and innovation,” but also for his deep humanity.

She might have been addressing the beauties of her own choreography. Once a student of both George Balanchine and Merce Cunningham, she blends ballet and modernism with unimpeachable authority. Her dancers rush into their dips, bends, modernized pirouettes and multiple ballet echoes in “Ligeti Essays” with unmistakable evocations of Balanchine’s verve, mystery and drama. Ballet and modernity meet and embrace.

On view during her *Armitage Gone!*

Dance troupe’s visit to the Dance Center of Columbia College, this work is stark, invigorating stuff. She ties her merciless technical assault (her six dancers won a standing ovation Thursday and deserved it) to a keen musical sensitivity. You may not anticipate her choices, but you watch agape as, time after time, she stuns you with their logic. Though much of “Ligeti” is harsh, unforgiving and physical, Armitage teases with unpredictable wit.

After a rigorous workout, “Ligeti” erupts with a fey folk line and circle dance. On a bare stage graced only with a giant, silver-painted tree, perfect décor for “Waiting for Godot,” Armitage tempers the Kurt Weill-on-steroids score with a scene of the dancers bearing metallic lanterns in fetching geometric designs, hints tribal mankind

will survive. The male duets are among the best sequences. But that’s not to short-change Frances Chiaverini, whose poise and precision center the work and forge hypnotic partnerships, especially with tall, satiny William Isaac and elastic Ryan Kelly, a former New York City Ballet dancer.

“Time is the echo of an axe within a wood” illustrates its Bela Bartok score with exhausting speed and wit, Chiaverini briefly posing her hands as puppy paws and all the dancers moving backward, wriggling their rears.

Armitage Gone! Dance performs through Saturday at the Dance Center, 1306 S. Michigan Ave. For tickets: 312-344-6600.

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