

world premieres as rich as manna

By **SUSAN BROILI**

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It felt like dance heaven as three international choreographers presented one wonderful world premiere after another in Reynolds Theater earlier this week. In what has been a strong American Dance Festival season, the program of work by Sabine Dahrendorf of Spain, Sukarji Sriman of Indonesia and Tatiana Baganova of Russia proved as rich as manna.

This heaven included a tiny flying pig, buckets of water, a stick-strewn path, inspired dancing, singing and music scores.

High production values in David Ferri's exquisite lighting, Matthew Eggleton's well-executed sets and Patrick Holt's well-suited costumes contributed to the feeling of supreme happiness.

ADF students made very challenging, unique movements look easy after just five weeks of working with choreographers. All these dancers could hold their own in a professional dance company.

So those pearly gates — the curtains — opened on these dances.

Dahrendorf's "Knistern" conveys a crackling intensity and shows what an imaginative choreographer can do by exploring one word — "knistern," a German word for the sound of flames breaking branches and wood. But, according to a program note, it also can mean the sparks that fly between two people, footfalls over the dry branches of a burnt land, "the sound of paper that unwraps unknown things" and the rustle of wings of the Phoenix, rising from the ashes.

The curtain rises on an intriguing

world. Surrounded by darkness, a man and woman seem suspended above the stage, leaning on a slant toward each other. (Later, more light reveals an architectural structure with angled top and handholds on its sides from which dancers hang by their legs, resembling bats.) A tall woman with a voluminous silver skirt overlaid with black diamond patterns carries a petite woman on her back as she follows a diagonal pathway of light littered with sticks. People sleep like logs on stair steps behind a narrow scrim on stage left.

Dancers' angular, thrusting arms and legs slash-burn space. In clusters, they resemble pulsing flames. Dancers' orange skirts and one woman's long, blonde hair whips and flares.

Joseph Sanou's score adds to the texture with its mix of crashes, crackles and rustles. ♡ ↗

Sriman's "A Time of Darkness" opens with a spiritual image: a kneeling, bare-chested Sriman, singing in a melodic, chanting way in front of a dark temple shape made by a tightly compressed group of dancers.

Sriman completely fuses traditional Indonesian movements with a modern dance sensibility. Dancers' fingers flutter one at a time into a flowing, weaving pattern that has a floating quality. They spread their legs wide, knees bent, and take small, quick steps.

They use space as a canvas, filling it individually and together. They push and shove each other, fight, as the spirit of chaos descends, the time of darkness described in the classical Indonesian poem from which Sriman took his title and inspiration.

Sriman uses the singing of three stanzas masterfully to provide an integral structure for the dance. He and Patrick Mueller shadow each other vocally and physically as Mueller sings the second stanza in

English, Sriman in Indonesian.

Donald McKayle displays an impressive vocal range and powerful voice when he sings, in English, the third stanza in which the poet calls on God for help. McKayle looks like a god, Sriman, the poet. The standing McKayle, arms stretched wide, palms out, fingers spread, and the kneeling Sriman facing him, arms raised, fingers close to McKayle's, create an exalted moment.

Like Marc Chagall, whose paintings inspired her, Tatiana Baganova offers a fanciful, topsy-turvy world inhabited by animals human and otherwise in her "Wings at Tea."

A sense of an earthy yet dreamlike barnyard permeates the dance. Women move as large, cow-like, rounded shapes, enhanced by big, puffed skirts. Or they strut on their toes, one hand held like a goose's head. Dancers wonder aloud about the small, flying pig, tethered on an almost invisible wire to a bar and set in motion early in the dance. Like the Energizer bunny, it keeps going throughout the dance.

The dance opens with men crouched way over and smoking. Sexuality seems more biological than erotic, especially in one funny section in which two women appear like peasants, each holding a bucket, then dip their hair in the bucket and fling arches of water drops. The men dip the women upside down in buckets on the floor and hold the buckets for more dips.

Baganova's exuberance also erupts in such sights as dancers on their stomachs shooting out from the wings.

The music includes some simply divine live cello playing by Chris Lancaster, who really found a niche (he's seated in one) for his passionate, dramatic and a bit quirky style. His hair stands up in two large horns, and a stuffed pig tops his cello.

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