

Music's moving in more ways than one

CHORAL GROUP APPEARS IN DANCE SERIES

Mruta Mertsí involved in stunning pieces, but more vigorous choreography left to pros

VICTOR SWOBODA
THE GAZETTE

Sanctity and show business mixed casually at the seventh edition of Choir and Choreographers, which had its premiere last Tuesday at Agora de la Danse. As in previous editions, the onstage singing was by the accomplished local choir Ensemble Mruta Mertsí. Five Montreal choreographers created the profane dances to what often sounded like prayerful music.

In Choir and Choreographers, singers get to be part of the dance. The goal is to get the body expressing itself completely through the voice to create "music of the body." A nice-sounding

faces and entire bodies emerged from inky blackness behind the walls of light, stretching the light as though it were taffy (you'll have to see it to understand). While all this eerie stuff was going on, the couple nonchalantly dined and flirted.

The visually spectacular scene blended a potentially explosive artistic cocktail of menace and humour. It came without a kicker, though. Turning the lights off unfairly aborted a scene of growing tension.

The other big visual number had everyone swaying grimly on swings. As a tangible metaphor for intangible music, it was delightful. But no one seemed interested in building the scene into anything more than an intriguing visual.

This edition's dancemakers - Pierre-Paul Savoie, Sylvain Émard, Lina Cruz, Guylaine Savoie and Alain Francoeur - gave the evening's more vigorous choreography to dedicated, non-singing dancers.

In white, Caroline Méthot and Nathaniél Siry-Fortin performed a love duet by Pierre-Paul Savoie, whose choreography of close clutches was not quite up to the performers' abandon. In sexy black, Lina Cruz and Élinor Fueter danced a duet by Cruz that ably exploited parallel moves. And Guylaine Savoie made the entrance of the night, descending on a wire from the ceiling in a gesture typical of this theatrical choreographer.

Another theatrical figure was the choir's founder, conductor, composer and all-round stage wizard, André Pappathomas. With his long arms and bony fingers sawing the air, he was a flamboyant, eye-catching figure in black.



PETER MARTIN THE GAZETTE

The 17 singers in Ensemble Mruta Mertsí (led by André Pappathomas, far right) periodically changed their configurations.

If dance is movement to music, then limber conductors like Pappathomas are unquestionably dancers. He showed it in a dance solo that he performed standing inside the frame of a box.

Pappathomas also composed the captivating music, a collection of rhythmically varied works using contemporary harmonies and sung in languages as different as Bulgarian, Hungarian and French (one text was by Molière). The balance among the choir's beautiful individual voices was especially impressive.

With its carefree mishmash of cultures, sculpted-shadow light-

ing and clever scenic illusions, the show had the unsettling, other-planet mystery of early Cirque du Soleil. It looked like Earth and they looked like real people, but this was one unearth-

ly place. It had the same connection to the real world that the name Mruta Mertsí - a nonsense word made up by French theatre legend Antonin Artaud - has to real language.

Choir and Choreographers is presented again tonight at 8 at Agora de la Danse, 840 Cherrier St. Tickets cost \$23, or \$16 for students and seniors. For details, phone (514) 525-1500.

Choir leader
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phrase, but why not just call it dance?

Throughout Tuesday's 80-minute piece, the 17 singers periodically shifted floor positions and choir arrangements. Sometimes they stood in familiar choral tiers, sometimes in a semi-circle. Often they split into staggered groups or walked while singing. In one instance, they formed pairs who physically interacted in a dynamic tableau.

The singers also participated in the evening's two most visually sensational numbers. In one, Les Convives (Guests), lighting designer Eric Belley created two walls of light, one on each side of a couple at a dinner table at centre stage. Ghostly hands, arms,