



Dance

## Wolfgang Pluck

Choreographer Christopher Caines jumps into Mozart

by **Deborah Jowitt**

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Whether or not the prodigious Mozart composed his "Piano Trio in E-flat Major, KV 498" while playing skittles, as he's said to have done, the very musical choreographer Christopher Caines takes that idea and runs with it in his *Skittle Alley (Ninepins)*, dividing his dancers into two noncombative teams, dressed by Ingrid Maurer in shades of blue and brown. Jamy Hsu wears soft slippers; Selena Chau, Christopher Woodrell, and Lauren Engleman bound through in sneakers; and Gisela Quinteros and Ivanova Aguilar, supported by Edgar Peterson and Cornelius Brown, work on pointe, as does soloist Michelle Vargo. In the confined space of the Clark Studio Theater, their lively comings and goings often create contrapuntal patterns so dense that any spectator in the mood to throw a ball could knock down at least five at a time. The fine pianist Marija Ilic, clarinetist Meighan Stoops, and violist Louise Schulman are a bit out of range.

Caines doesn't make small dancing. In *The Farewell to Music*, the fullness, even extravagance, that he asks of his performers marries eloquently with the two suites of Mozart songs that he has assembled, the first group in Italian, the second in German. I don't simply mean the occasional gesture of hand to brow or the many times people swoon or collapse at the end of a song, but the lavish scale of the movement. Even the most balletic steps look urgent, fluid, rarely posed. Hsu is especially notable for the way her body breathes and sings.

The songs we hear—beautifully delivered by mezzo-sopranos Silvie Jensen and Alison Taylor Cheeseman, tenor David Root, and baritone Christopher Herbert, with Ilic at the piano—hymn the beauty of a beloved, lament her absence, and chide her infidelity, although there's a rowdy drinking song that incites a lot of foolishness in the choreography and another in praise of food and drink that makes the dancers go slack-bodied. Caines creates some lovely images and patterns. A man playing a pretty game with two women gives each alternately a gentle backward push as he bounds forward. Lines are a recurring motif: The performers group as if for a contra dance, link arms in a chain, weave around one another. Brown and Engleman come together in a tender duet while Root sings to a dreamed-of beauty. When Caines enters despondently, his friends, one by one, break into his solitude to comfort him with dancing, until the beautiful, grave Vargo joins him for Mozart's gentle "To Joy." It's Vargo who embodies the last plaintive words Jensen utters; alone and beseeching, she indeed seems to be saying farewell to all the glories of music and love.