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The rich contrasts in Marsalis's score give Fagan ample scope for invention in *Lighthouse/Lightning Rod*.

Garth Fagan proceeds like a painter or sculptor of landscapes more than a dramatist. Every Fagan dance I have seen, if not every piece the Jamaican émigré has made since establishing his troupe upstate four decades ago, features extended balances that act like a pool in a Japanese garden, a meditative pause in the surroundings. He frames flurries of prancing and twirling in enough empty space that we see the current of motion. He translates music, to which he is especially attuned, into pattern more often than metaphor.

The work does gain, however, when somebody supplies a scrap of story. Wynton Marsalis does not do that for *Lighthouse/Lightning Rod*, his first collaboration with Fagan since their justly celebrated *Griot New York* of 1991. But his alternation between dizzying bebop and lounge-lizard lulls – his septet live and magnificent for this first outing of the dance – has enough verve to turn the choreography ragged with energy and enough dynamic range for Fagan to foment his own dramas.

Fagan's variations on the theme of extremes – the salving glow of "lighthouse" versus the "lightning rod's" electrifying threat – are gratifyingly inventive. Under the gaze of sculptor Alison Saar's spindly bronze folk goddess in white, with bundled twigs for hair, the 16 dancers streamed on like schools of iridescent fish, glommed together to twitch, or spanned the stage to stir the air slowly with a leg before they toppled to the floor. Sometimes divergent tempos and temperaments seized the stage at once: worlds beside worlds.

Before the polarities could become predictable, Fagan grew allusive. Dressed in a cleaning-lady shift and kerchief from another era, Tere Lyn Jones torqued her torso so violently she seemed to want to unscrew her top half. She repeated this ode to futility with stirring disbelief in inevitable failure. Every once in a while, a man in field-hand overalls galloped across the stage, his arms flung out before him. In the midst of the terror and despair, statuesque Lindsay Renea and Shanon Castle carved out an oasis of lapidary calm from their overlapping bodies. With Fagan's typical sureness of touch, the scene skirted cliché to plumb a familiar American history of threat and escape. It hit hard.