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PERFORMING ARTS **Doug Varone and Dancers**

Doug Varone drenches his choreography in emotionality. Adept at evoking the deeply felt through evocative gestures, sideways glances, a barely-there brush of a cheek or a full-out smack, Varone boldly mines interior landscapes. On Friday at George Mason University, Doug Varone and Dancers wove an exquisite program of works, recent and established, that showcased top-notch dancing from the nine-member company as it looks toward celebrating two decades next season.

"Castles," from 2004, discovers anew composer Sergey Prokofiev's sweeping waltzes. Where once ball-gown-clad royalty frolicked amid the passion and bluster of Prokofiev's three-quarter time, Varone's eight dynamic dancers bring to the music a relaxed agility. But amid the quicksilver intermingling of partners and small groups, Varone tosses in a reverent bow, a fusillade of footwork, a rococo turn of the wrist, all suggesting courtly hierarchy and the roots of Western classical dance. Wit and whimsy transform this complex tapestry of gestures, swift runs, falls and sweeping arms into a contemporary relationship study. On a darkened stage, partitioned by David Ferri's columns of light, two couples -- first John Beasant III and Daniel Charon, later Natalie Desch and Eddie Taketa -- tangle and tumble in intimate abandon.

Four couples push through and ride John Adams's pulsating score "Fearful Symmetries" in "Rise," from 1993. Here seemingly endless combinations of dancers attract and repel, merging and separating like so many protons and electrons orbiting a volatile nucleus.

The program opened with Desch and Charon, who replaced an injured Varone, in "Short Story," the choreographer's compact study in the hot-tempered and heart-rending games couples play.

-- Lisa Traiger