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FeetFirst

News, reviews and think pieces about dance and performance art for aficionados and newcomers by long-time national and local critic.

Ballet BC: Worth a Trip to Vancouver

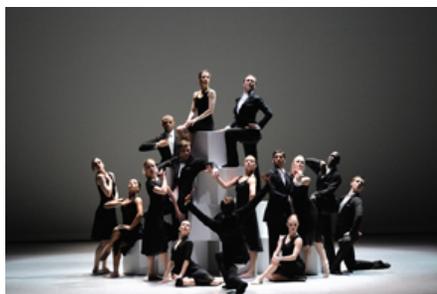
Posted on March 22, 2015 | By alicekaderlan

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Ballet BC, 8 pm, March 26-28, Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Vancouver. Tickets: \$30-80 at <http://www.balletbc.com/performances.html>

By Alice Kaderlan

Vancouver’s Ballet BC has a distinctive place in the West Coast dance universe, bringing a European aesthetic to contemporary ballet as befits the international city it calls home. But the troupe has a low to non-existent profile in Seattle, which is a shame given the quality of its performances and the diversity of its repertoire.



Artists of Ballet BC in “Petite Cérémonie.” Photo by Michael Slobodian.

Like the dancers in Europe’s finest contemporary companies, Ballet BC’s members are classically trained; technically proficient, they have exquisite extensions and a beautiful line. They’re also used to working with many different movement vocabularies, each season performing a dazzling array of new work by a wide range of choreographers. A lot of the credit for the company’s success goes to Artistic Director Emily Molnar, who hires all the dancers, oversees company class and rehearsals and determines the repertoire. Molnar says that, apart from technical skill, Ballet BC’s 18 dancers (including Andrew

Bartee, formerly of PNB) share other qualities not found in all companies. “They’re all individuals who want to make the art the most important thing,” she explains, “and they participate deeply and cooperatively in the creative process, working as hard in the studio as they do on stage, really taking ownership of the company.”

Besides creating her own ballets for the company, Molnar has a keen eye for exciting guest choreographers, refined during her years as a dancer with National Ballet of Canada and Frankfurt Ballet under William Forsythe. A number of them are European stars, like Medhi Walerski, whose work Seattle has never seen.

Walerski is a dancer/choreographer with Nederlands Dans Theater (NDT) and considered one of the most innovative makers of contemporary ballet anywhere. I first saw his work at NDT’s home in The Hague some years ago; since then I try to catch his ballets whenever I can.

On its upcoming program, Ballet BC will perform Walerski’s “Petite Cérémonie,” which was given its world premiere by the company in 2011. Set to music by Mozart, Bellini and Vivaldi, it’s a crowd pleaser, receiving rave reviews at its opening from critics and public alike.

"Mehdi is very conceptual but incredibly emotional in the way he builds his movement," explains Molnar. "In 'Petite C eremonie' the opening starts slowly and you're not sure where it's going to go but it then builds to a crescendo full of humanity and life. It's very welcoming and leaves you with a feeling of joy, of playfulness."

Walerski's highly collaborative method of working with dancers is a perfect fit for Ballet BC. For "Petite C eremonie," he asked the dancers to imagine what it would be like to live life in a box; their joint exploration has resulted in a ballet that examines confinement as both restriction and freedom, among other themes.

Another choreographer on the program who may also be unfamiliar to Seattleites is Walter Matteini, another rising choreographic star in Europe. Matteini's ballets are in the repertoire of some of Europe's most acclaimed contemporary ballet companies including Lyon Opera Ballet, Les Ballets de Monte Carlo and Aterballetto, and he is lauded for an ability to convey emotion through movement. According to Ballet BC, the new work will "play between the light and dark sides of human nature."

Rounding out the program is the Canadian premiere of William Forsythe's "workwithinwork," which should provide a provocative contrast to the all-Forsythe program that PNB has just concluded, and to one particular work that PNB performed, "New Suite."

Like "New Suite," "workwithinwork" distills steps from classical ballet down to their most basic but always with a twist. In "workwithinwork" short solos, pas de deux and ensemble groupings appear and disappear as the dancers shape their bodies into an astonishing array of geometries. What a treat to be able to see more of Forsythe's groundbreaking style, this time around on Ballet BC's impressive and distinctive troupe.

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