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## Ballet B.C.'s Trace reveals an exciting new generation of dancers

*by Janet Smith on March 27th, 2015 at 1:47 PM*SHARED **65****0**

MICHAEL SLOBODIAN

**A Ballet B.C. presentation. At the Queen Elizabeth Theatre on Thursday, March 26. Continues until March 28**

Where do you start talking about [Ballet British Columbia's latest program](#)? Is it with the technical chops the troupe showed tackling William Forsythe's flickering, unforgiving *workwithinwork*? Is it with the nightmare delirium conjured in Walter Matteini's eerie yet moving new *Lascia ch'io pianga*? Or is it with the news that the dancers are staging that beloved piece of whimsy, *Petite Cérémonie*, for the final time with panache and polish?

No, let's instead begin with the fact that Trace, as diverse as it is entertaining, reveals an exciting new generation of dancers taking centre stage at the company. From the diminutive firecracker Emily Chessa exploding frantically in *Lascia* to Christoph von Riedemann deadpanning in *Cérémonie*, there is much fresh talent adding to an already strong mix.

That these performers could tackle the Forsythe piece, with all its flicking hands and blurring speed, is a testament to their technical skill in interpreting his intensely detailed en pointe play. Dancers like Darren Devaney, with his spiralling hands, as well as Connor Gnam, Chessa, Scott Fowler, and Racheal Prince show the requisite snap and elasticity the movement demands as pas de deux melt in and out of one another. As frantic and spiky as the choreography is, set to the angular, atonal strings of Luciano Berio's difficult *Duets for two violins*, the overall effect is hypnotic.



If Forsythe's spare work is entirely about movement, music, and extension, Matteini's is the polar opposite: a cinematic evocation of deep emotional landscapes that's drawn moodily to the floor. The theme here is that we suffer by suppressing emotion and can find freedom through showing it—through the weeping referred to in the title, taken from the George Frederick Handel aria that features prominently in the work, alongside haunting sounds of wind and clanging metal. Figures magically and disorientingly appear and disappear into the darkness (with the help of transparent, tinted screens), melding into embraces, skittering across the floor, flailing in distress, and hunching in pain.

The most creepily recurring image is of two ghostlike bodies, suspended upside down in the air, spinning above dancers at centre stage. The Italian choreographer's latest hallucination (his other Ballet B.C. work, 2011's *Parole Sospese*, was equally unforgettable) really taps the dancer's dramatic skills. You're left with a feeling of catharsis, like you've just travelled down into the darkest recesses of someone's deepest thoughts and emotions, and felt what they felt.

The ambitious look (aided by James Proudfoot's fever-dream lighting) feels a bit like Hieronymous Bosch, Salvador Dali, and Max Ernst by way of David Lynch, only with an aching emotional core.

It's work so theatrical that even the most ballet-averse of audience members could "get it"—and the same goes for French choreographer Medhi Walerski's *Petite Cérémonie*. So it's sad we won't see this fun little piece again: before the show, artistic director Emily Molnar announced it would be the final presentation of it.

From Gilbert Small and Scott Fowler's twisted, foot-shuffling duet to Livona Ellis's sensual, earthy solo against ballroom swing dancers to Peter Smida's warped speech on men and women, delivered while the dancer is juggling three balls, it's a showcase for its performers' personalities. It's also a joy ride, a mad mashing of strict unison and flailing chaos, performed by a troupe dressed in formal attire against a stage opened to its flies. If you haven't seen it and need a smile, you had best get down to the Queen E. Friday or Saturday.

Fortunately, though, **Molnar also announced** that Walerski will be creating a full-evening work next season, so we can expect more of his witty windows onto the world—and more from this charismatic team of dancers.

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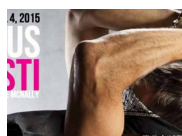
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