



Ballet British Columbia review – party beats and spinning solos

Sadler's Wells, London Crystal Pite, Emily Molnar and Sharon Eyal deliver a triple bill of new works that range from hazardous to poignant

Judith Mackrell

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Tamara Rojo's all-female programme *She Said* was part of a modest watershed for women choreographers in 2016. At Ballet British Columbia, Emily Molnar was making a comparable statement of intent, presenting a new triple bill of works by herself, Crystal Pite and Sharon Eyal. Feminist commissioning policies have helped to shift the culture of dance, with the repertory choices of most major companies coming under progressively close scrutiny. But Molnar's programme claims no manifesto beyond the gender of

its choreographers, and the three works here - part of a UK tour - are left to stand or fall by the quality of their choreography and ideas.

The evening starts with Molnar's 16 + a room, a skidding, densely patterned work that starts from the imagined idea of putting 16 dancers inside a tilting, unstable room. The stage doesn't actually move, but Molnar creates an impression of hazard through the harsh restless lights that circle the space, the threatening beats of Dirk P Haubrich's score and, above all, the queasy, off-kilter dynamic of her choreography.

The dancers (there are just 13 of them in this touring version) are rarely at ease, sheering off stage and sliding headlong back into formation, as if shaken by a giant hand. Even when they dance individually or in duets, their movements grapple to maintain an equilibrium and seem on the verge of flying apart. If the effect is physically arresting, Molnar moves her work on to genuinely shaky ground when she tries to introduce more metaphysical themes and has her dancers presenting signs announcing, "This is a beginning" and "This is not the end."



Searingly poetic ... Ballet BC dancers performing Crystal Pite's Solo Echo. Photograph: Wendy D

These are shopworn postmodern conceits and Crystal Pite makes a far more profound exploration of time in Solo Echo, a setting of two Brahms sonatas that traces a journey from adolescence to maturity and beautifully hints at the losses experienced en route. During the first half, as snow falls gently in the background, the seven dancers take flight into spinning solos and travelling duets. Pite's gift for the poetics of dance is evident everywhere; even the most functional gesture of balance or support feels freighted with observed and felt emotion.

But the choreography becomes most searing in the second half. Pite orchestrates her dancers through a brilliantly inventive variety of groupings, each one evoking scenarios of support and letting go. As individuals fall away from the group, it is a series of little deaths, not just of friends or family but of a person's own youthful traits. When finally the dancers slip from the stage, leaving the last one lying prone, the image has a quality of ineffable poignancy and of peace.



Quasi-comic ... Scott Fowler and Kirsten Wicklund with Ballet BC dancers in Sharon Eyal's Bill. Photograph: Chris Randle

Sharon Eyal's Bill - made in collaboration with Gai Behar - provides a funfair of a finale, its choreography propelled by the party beats of Ori Lichtik's score. It starts with a series of quasi-comic solos - robotic, stretchy, saggy - but builds to an epic scale, as 18 dancers mass into groups, working in unison or in counterpoint. Eyal's choreography utilises the joyous technical expertise of this excellent company, but its overall effect turns from the hypnotic to the soporific.

● At Sadler's Wells, London, until 7 March. Box office: 020-7863 8000. At Brighton Dome on 9 March. Box office: 01273 709709. Then touring until 24 March.

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