Ballet BC presents tantalizing triple bill

ROGER LEVESQUE  Updated: January 13, 2019

Alberta Ballet and One Yellow Rabbit present Ballet BC, A Tantalizing Triple Bill

Where: Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium

When: 7:30 p.m., Jan. 18 and Jan. 19; 2 p.m. Matinee Jan. 19 only

Tickets: $41 to $94 from Ticketmaster (1-855-985-5000 or ticketmaster.ca)

Drama, irony, joy, humour, romance, tragedy.

In contemporary dance, you could argue that the medium’s lack of rules offers a wider emotional breadth than classical ballet, as dancers literally run the gamut of feelings in some works.

For Emily Molnar, artistic director of Ballet BC, it comes down to the calibre of the individual dancers and the chemistry between them.

"I think a great classical dancer is a contemporary dancer because they’re living the work today, and the greatest dancers are always testing what the classical form could be. To me, that’s a contemporary dancer inside the classical form. So there is a certain flexibility of ideas open to choreographers now, but it's really up to the performer and how much they're living the piece in the present and testing the boundaries."

As it happens, Ballet BC straddles both angles as a contemporary company of 18 dancers fully trained in classical ballet techniques.

"I often compare our dancers to great jazz musicians who were raised with classical training."

In their upcoming triple-bill playing Edmonton and Calgary under the auspices of Alberta Ballet, you can expect an eclectic range of material from several internationally famous choreographers.

Vancouver-based Ballet BC’s first appearance here in over a decade will feature an established landmark work in veteran American choreographer William Forsythe’s Enemy In The Figure. That’s followed by Solo Echo, a relatively new work from acclaimed dance creator Crystal Pite who leads her own contemporary company on the coast. Finally, Petite Ceremonie, is a piece that guest choreographer and European dance star Medhi Walerski created for Ballet BC back in 2011.
The three works are featured on a triple-bill with two intermissions. As Molnar explains, they each find a balance between abstraction and narratives or no narrative at all, and each work breaks down into solo, duo or ensemble sections. She feels they are all “beautiful, well-crafted pieces with intricate architecture” but very different in their own way.

The opening work, Enemy In The Figure, involves nine dancers over 29 minutes. Molnar knows the piece from her own experience dancing for William Forsythe. It’s very tied to the poetry of shadow play on the walls of the stage.

"He took ballet into a completely new world. This piece was made in 1989 and it’s still ahead of its time. It’s only lit by one light, by the dancers who move it around. It has incredible architecture, it’s so athletic, and virtuosic and there are a lot of improvisational techniques inside that give it a very layered structure that’s quite a challenge for the performers to execute. It also has a beautiful score by Thom Willems and it’s a masterwork of 20th century ballet."

The two other works include mostly classical composers.

"Just because it’s called contemporary ballet that doesn’t mean that it won’t call on things that haven’t existed already. Going forward doesn’t mean you erase the past."

Pite’s Solo Echo features seven dancers in a 20-minute work set to two of Johannes Brahms’ sonatas for cello and piano, the first written early, and the other late in his life, so they reflect very different thoughts and atmospheric energy.

"Her piece is really about seven dancers who play different iterations of the same person. It takes inspiration from the poem Lines For Winter by Mark Strand and basically asks ‘who are we as human beings?’ as she weaves all seven dancers into the same person seen from different points of view. There’s a beautiful collective feel that delivers the story through the movements."

Walerski’s Petite Ceremonie uses 15 dancers over 27 minutes, moving to the music of Mozart, Puccini, Rogers & Hart and Vivaldi.

"When he first created the piece for us, Medhi (Walerski) asked the dancers, ‘what would it feel like if you lived your life in a box?’ and from that, he starts to examine the difference between the male and the female brain and the relationships between us. It’s a very playful but thought-provoking work, but also very human and based around stories that are being told throughout."

This year marks Molnar’s 10th anniversary with Ballet BC, a decade that has seen serious progress for the company’s international reputation not to mention an expanded repertoire of over 45 new works created by acclaimed choreographers from all over.

"When I first took over we had people who said, ‘well I only like ballet’ and I told them ‘come and see what we do’ because this is connected to ballet, because we stand true to the virtuosity, which is what people enjoy about ballet work. That is still very much in every piece that we do. It’s about the incredible sophistication of the body in motion, and the musicality, and the diversity of dance."
Molnar graduated from the National Ballet School to become a member of the National Ballet of Canada and also danced with William Forsythe during his tenure as a choreographer in Frankfurt, Germany before she became a principal dancer with Ballet BC. Along the way she has danced with or collaborated as a choreographer with numerous companies around the world. Now principally tied to choreography, she was recently appointed to the Order Of Canada.

She's very passionate when it comes to her ever-evolving art form:

"It's about the dancers and their relationship to an audience. It's not just what we're making, but how we're creating it and the culture in which we're working. Art is the most important person in the room. It's important that the dancers I work with are on stage because they have something to say."

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