

Fall 2014

# Ballet Review



## National and International Reviews from Ballet Review Fall 2014

On the cover: Bijayini Satpathy and Surupa Sen in *Songs of Love and Longing*. (Photo: Stephanie Berger, Baryshnikov Arts Center)

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**Cover photograph by Stephanie Berger, Baryshnikov Arts Center:  
Bijayini Satpathy and Surupa Sen in *Songs of Love and Longing*.**

For those who pay attention to such things, Miami City Ballet's second program at the Adrienne Arsht Center was called "See the Music." The music, in this case, began with Bach's Double Violin Concerto and was followed, after a pause, by Benjamin Britten's String Quartet No. 1. Later we heard a recording of Maria del Mar Bonet sing five Catalan songs, and to close the program we had Rachmaninoff's Symphonic Dances, Opus 45.

The choreographers, in order of appearance, were George Balanchine, Justin Peck,

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Nacho Duato, and Alexei Ratmansky. It was a fascinating bit of musical and choreographic programming to have Peck of New York City Ballet with Britten's String Quartet follow directly on the heels of Balanchine and Bach. What could those comparisons possibly lead one to conclude? In my case, it was that *Concerto Barocco* is a ballet you can never see enough of, and that Peck, at twenty-six, has already created in the pas de deux *Chutes and Ladders* (2012) a work that can follow a masterpiece and truly hold its own.

I'm going to skip ahead here to my overall impression, which, at nearly three hours, was so good in every respect I almost thought I was back in New York. What did the local audience enjoy most? Nacho Duato's *Jardi Tanca*. Why? My guess is that the *Grapes of Wrath* aura that hung over the entire affair made them wistful for a time or a country they once knew, but I could be wrong. There are never any jokes in a Duato ballet, that's for sure, and while the movement is poetic it couldn't help but remind me that Duato's former boss, Jiří Kylián, did it all with a hell of a lot more panache and a sense of humor.

The greatest ballet on the program was, of course, *Concerto Barocco*. No need to expound on that here, and while I was hoping Ratmansky would give Mr. B a run for his money, I must say I was disappointed and confused by his *Symphonic Dances*, a ballet I would like to rename *The Pajama Game*. Danced in what looked like the amorphous schmatas one used to see parading across the beaches of Thailand worn by various latter-day hippies, the ballet came off as similarly impossible to define.

A vague *Scarlet Letter* story was hinted at by some man sporting a red splash mark on his singular white costume during the opening sequence, but after that I felt like most of the Republicans in Congress (i.e., more and more befuddled by the facts). At the conclusion of the ballet, after all sorts of comings and goings that further hinted at something you couldn't quite put your finger on, this same red mark reappeared on a singular woman. How? Why? Who knows? At nearly 11:00 p.m.,

who cared? The dancing was lovely and the choreography as polished as a new Ferrari but, golly, it was like trying to finish the Saturday crossword puzzle without an eraser or Rex Parker to fall back on.

Alas, Ratmansky stated right there in black and white in the program, “There is no real story.” Well, as Shakespeare’s Queen Gertrude observed, “The lady doth protest too much, methinks.” The most sublime aspect of this valiant but disingenuous effort was Mark Stanley’s lighting. As a rule, I don’t necessarily think much about lighting designers, but the combination of Adeline André and Istvan Dohar’s costume color palette and Stanley’s lighting was nothing short of hallucinogenic.

It brought me back to MCB’s first program of the season and Stanley’s equally alluring work on Wheeldon’s *Polyphonia*. Given the length of the evening and the degree to which Ratmansky seemed to mercilessly tease me into trying to figure out what was going on in a ballet that had “no real story” but certainly seemed to, I was grateful to have Mr. Stanley holding my hand and saying, “Don’t worry, dear, it’s only a movie.”

## New York

Joseph Houseal

New York City Ballet looks glorious, as wonderful as it has looked in many years. Clearly the caliber and consistency of training is reaping its harvest in this generation. With dancers as personable and assured as Tiler Peck and Sara Mearns revitalizing the clarity and intensity of Balanchine, leading a growing number of younger dancers who also throw themselves fearlessly into exciting new choreography, while maintaining the unique qualities of NYCB, we have all the evidence needed that the company is in fine fettle.

The balance and harmony between the company and different choreographers varies according to the degrees of mutual understanding. The company’s comfort with Jerome Robbins afforded a lovely *Afternoon of a Faun*, as well as, more remarkably for its stylistic in-



Photo: Paul Komille, New York City Ballet

*Acheron*: Tiler Peck and Robert Fairchild.

tentions, the masque-like *The Four Seasons* set to Verdi. Mearns, carrying Wheeldon’s exquisite DGV: *Danse à Grande Vitesse*, is a study in authoritative artistry. She is a native denizen of a particular universe.

In the ballet *La Stravaganza*, revived from 1997, by the prodigious French choreographer Angelin Preljocaj, we see a master working with familiar artistic tropes. We hear baroque music cut with audioscapes of technology, shattering glass, and other intangible cascades. We encounter a meeting of worlds historical and contemporary.

Preljocaj’s earlier astonishing remakes of Ballets Russes masterpieces are fantastic theatrical choreography working well within the historical idiom of ballet. His *Annonciation* also uses Vivaldi mixed with audioscapes, references to fine art, and historical discourse within several disciplines using the languages of the combined arts.

Ballet as a form allows historical discourse within it. Alexei Ratmansky and Christopher Wheeldon understand this well. Part of the beauty of Wheeldon’s work is the elegance of its relationship to the past. Part of the robustness of Ratmansky’s work relies on his incredible knowledge of the art of ballet. Preljocaj is European, deeply knowledgeable of visual art, and his work speaks a traditional, symbolic language of ballet – but more than that, at the same time it unleashes a torrent of original, richly motivated, and informed chore-

ography. It is a Renaissance man's delight, and a sure sign of the strength of the form – a strength reflected in the caliber of artists drawn to it.

It is a pity the company did not understand the Preljocaj work. They simply did not. The moment I saw the modern ballerinas chewing the forearms of the historical men, I knew it was all wrong. There's chewing and then there's chewing. There's ballet chewing, like Giselle having a picnic snack; there's avant-garde chewing, like a butoh dancer trying to eat a rock larger than his body. But this? This is a different: European avant-garde ballet-chewing, and you have to get it right or it merely looks like ballerinas chewing and that's just weird. It's historical discourse chewing. What's not to get?

I have had the good fortune of having seen a lot of Preljocaj's work on his own dancers and on other companies in Europe. He is one of my favorite choreographers, one of the best in ballet. *La Stravaganza* is a beautiful, large work, and it requires the correct sensibility for its execution. Balanchine himself provides a clear example: how many times have we seen Balanchine performed by performers who just don't get it? The steps are there, but Balanchine isn't. In the case of NYCB's magnificent *La Stravaganza*, the steps were there; Preljocaj was not.

By glorious contrast *Acheron*, created by the extraordinary Liam Scarlett. Scarlett has won a number of choreographic awards in England. A boy from Suffolk, he trained at The Royal Ballet School from the age of eleven. This is the first time I have seen his work. Stand-out. One to watch.

How great to see Britain producing another homegrown ballet choreographer. *Acheron* was created for NYCB in 2014, and performed to the spine-straightening Poulenc organ concerto played live with the orchestra by the electrifying Michael Hey. It is a huge noise, producing huge silences. Tiler Peck and her partner Robert Fairchild danced on top of it like Himalayan antelope. They are shining artists, impeccable and inviting in their un-

attainability, even as this role provided Peck a change from the vivacious roles she frequently gets. Her command of the movement is a belief in the choreography. Slow lines, dark moods, mature awareness.

If NYCB is producing artists like Peck and Fairchild who dance with such life and freedom, then something is very right with the company, something purely good and individually excellent. As a result the whole art of ballet benefits. The health of an art is in the art: Rude health at the City Ballet.

This is a great time to see the company, and nowhere better than in *Acheron*. Scarlett has understood something about the grandeur of the City Ballet as a group. It was mirrored in its uncredited set, a low ranging, Gehry-looking, platinum, dune horizon.

Dancers appeared in front of it and behind it as if in different worlds, like a chorus of echoes. Halftone side lighting from the waist down avoided the usual avant-garde side glare, while providing nuance to the ombré unitards. Topless men wore tights that faded light to dark, top to bottom. Women wore unitards fading dark to light, top to bottom. There was ombré to the entire piece, an inverse dichotomy at play. The whole aesthetic effect was well conceived, atmospheric, and active on many levels.

The choreography was marked by asymmetry and choreographic concurrence between dancing units, be they two people, or ten, or the two and the ten. The musically original movement was lush and at the same time, somber and compelling. An elegant coolness pervaded the pas de deux, as Peck and Fairchild appeared in lone pools of light in a dark blackness.

However abstracted, the piece is built and is sustained by relationships, genuine and deep, but coolly expressed. The dancers rarely looked at each other. But it was a future vision of ballet, working at an almost rapturous level, revealing the magnificence of the NYCB, which comes out of this ballet really looking like a company with a style. Scarlett has also choreographed two works for the

Miami City Ballet. I am keen to see those and anything else this exciting young talent brings forward.

It is rather a dance writer's delight: a guy I never heard of makes a new ballet, and it makes New York City Ballet look like the New York City Ballet of the future. Ballet does that.

## Brooklyn, NY

Sandra Genter

New choreography at Brooklyn's Academy of Music and other local venues, makes you aware of how important production values, especially modern technology, have become in today's concert dance. But excessive production can have a negative side too. The implementation of all those hi-tech elements often overshadows the dancing. European companies with their large budgets are the most obvious culprits.

William Forsythe, and choreographers like him, lean toward creating productions with complex activities that also include dancers. Forsythe's work is constantly employing new technology with a strong theatrical effect. Some of his company in *Sider*, a work presented at BAM, had tiny earphones to hear notes on Elizabethan text communicated from Forsythe who was backstage. But audience members hear only the vocals and sounds, composed by Thom Willems, that are not easy on their ears. In fact the blasting sound can be painfully loud, coming from every direction and in every frequency. A high, overhead structure from which lights were turned on and off from time to time also distracts.

Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker's work includes much concern about light and time of day. The stage was so dim at the start of *Cesena* (appearing along with *En Atendant*) that for a very long time, one could see very little, if anything. These events of physical discomfort brought to mind Merce Cunningham's work *Winterbranch* (1964) with its deafening La Monte Young score (2 *Sounds*) and Robert Rauschenberg's blinding, roving lighting directed into the audience. *Cesena*

was an uncomfortable avant-garde happening, but the dancing was great.

However when dance technology is a blend of talented collaborators it can be a gift to behold. Over at Lincoln Center it was wonderful to watch (for a third time) the Mark Morris Dance Group perform *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, set to Handel's pastoral ode based on Milton's poems, Adrienne Lobel's scenery, and James F. Ingalls' lighting. The dancers, dressed in Christine Van Loon's easy-draped costumes in gorgeous colors that we also see on the backdrops, walk, run, jump, leap, slap, fly, and completely take one's breath away with their beauty. Morris brought it all together with his stunning choreography. Celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary, *L'Allegro* is an example of opera house production and artistic skills well wedded.

Two of the last pieces of BAM's Next Wave Festival, *Moses(es)* by Reggie Wilson at the Harvey Theater and *BLEED* by Tere O'Connor at the Opera House's Fishman Space, were different, but both were brimming with great performances and perfect technical support.

The Reggie Wilson | Fist & Heel Performance Group work, unusually well conceived by Wilson and Susan Manning (the project dramaturge), examines multiple versions of the "Moses" narrative. The Brooklyn-based choreographer drew inspiration from Zora Neal Hurston's book *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, as well as the Moses story told as a Southern folktale in African American vernacular. Wil-



*BLEED*: Silas Rienner.

Photo: Ian Douglas, Brooklyn Academy of Music

son's own visits to Egypt, Turkey, and Mali were realized in the soundscapes, movement, and singing.

The audience might have had a clue concerning Wilson's love of travel by the very large pile of tinsel, running across the stage, that he stuffed into a red suitcase at the start of the piece. Throughout the work, the choreographer's presence was seen: he sat upstage left, sometimes just taking in the action, or beating out rhythms and singing with his dancers.

The company danced to Louis Armstrong, The Klezmatiks, Amahlokohloko, The Blind Boys of Alabama, and many others. The lighting designer and technical director, Jonathan Belcher, created the atmosphere for the various references to exodus, slavery, and freedom – all relating to what the dancers were doing.

There were nine performers. Six very tall, male dancers were elegant and moved with ease, while the featured woman (Anna Schon) was strong, a faction of their size, and almost as powerful as the men. Rhetta Aleong, the second woman, also was a singer.

The dancers traveled around the stage in lines and floor plans, moving from place to place as migrants. Their dancing was exciting to see: huge vertical jumps with legs bent like giant frogs, wide deep pliés, complex partnering, group lifts high into the air. Wilson's company is amazing to watch. The dancers have such an open, optimistic appeal that it makes one smile.

The Fishman Space, the venue for Tere O'Connor's *BLEED*, is BAM's newest theater and it worked well for this world premiere. There was seating on three sides: the dancers entered from an upstage wing. Sitting in the front row I could see firsthand the movement quality and technical excellence of these fascinating dancers of all shapes and ages from twenty to fifty-five years old.

This piece was so rich in material that the interest for me was the dancing itself. There was some history about the making of the work. O'Connor has said that *BLEED* is the cul-

minating work of a two-year project during which he constructed three other dances that have entirely affected this final one, a completely new evening-length work.

Heather Olson's opening solo was unique in its unfamiliar and rather strange gestures and movement, but it was danced wonderfully. O'Connor's nonformulaic vocabulary intrigued because of its freshness and invention, ranging from quiet, simple walking to phrases of highly virtuosic, exciting lifts and jumps – all so realized by his very fine performers.

The production had original music for instruments and vocals, eccentric costume designs for each dancer, and beautiful lighting. These elements enhanced O'Connor's splendid choreography.

## Toronto

Gary Smith

At the Four Seasons Centre The National Ballet of Canada presented just about a perfect double bill. In pairing Aszure Barton's sometimes startling, sometimes enigmatic, but always beautiful ballet, *Watch her*, with Ashton's *A Month in the Country*, NBC artistic director Karen Kain once again shows she understands the need for contrast.

This is the sort of program The National Ballet of Canada should be producing often. In choosing to pair a classic masterwork with a aggressive piece of contemporary dancemaking, the company shows eclectic thinking that is both smart and essential. But just because two pieces of dance are brilliant doesn't mean they can coexist on the same bill. Happily the juxtaposition of Barton's dance, classically rooted but always contemporary in tone, sat beautifully beside the Ashton.

Each of these works is about repression, escape, sublimated desire, and a sense of voyeurism. Each makes you feel like an outsider looking in. It's not for nothing that windows are important metaphors in each of these works.

Ashton's ballet begins with a grand sweep

of drapes that reveal a claustrophobic drawing room. In this heavily painted, ornate setting we are permitted to see the private passions and indiscretions of a seemingly calm, but troubled household.

In *Watch her*, Barton places downstage a “watcher,” just outside an open window, cut into the solid surface of a rough wall. It suggests something austere, perhaps even Orwellian. When our watcher scrambles through this opening into the private world beyond, he becomes, like us, a voyeur intent on discovering secrets of a diverse universe.

In each of these ballets, we recognize that the traditional role models ascribed to men and women are largely straitjackets. We also see a shucking off of physical and mental trappings those images suggest. For Barton it is more physical. For Ashton it’s more emotional.

Several of the women in *Watch her* begin to dress in looser, more sensual costumes that reveal skin, feeling, and passion. Some of the men rip off their jackets and ties, discarding a look of commerce that seemed to trap them. In each of these compelling ballets, what appears to be an ordered environment is toppled from its moorings.

*A Month in the Country’s* young and beautiful tutor Beliaev upsets surface calm in a country house, replete with heavy chandeliers, busy wall decoration, and shimmering curtains that billow at a large, French-style window. Beyond that window a garden suggests a world of less restricted life. A bird in a gilded cage hangs just left of center stage, an image of entrapment.

When Natalia Petrovna, a bored and beautiful woman married to an adoring but elderly husband, falls romantically for the handsome young man hired to teach her young son, this ordered world falls apart. Not only does Natalia long for Beliaev, but so does her son Kolia, expertly danced by Francesco Gabriele Frola. Her young ward Vera (Elena Lobanova), as well as Katia, the household maid, (Alexandra MacDonald) also share fantasies about the young man’s porcelain beauty.

This elegantly choreographed piece is set in mood-drenched hues by Julia Trevelyan Oman. Her gorgeous costumes and shimmering set are stunning. Everything is perfect in this evocative room – too perfect however for truth.

Ashton, a master at creating story through movement, never found a way of releasing sexual desire in his ballets. That should be at the center of this piece based upon the beguiling



Photo: Colla von Tiedemann, National Ballet of Canada

*Watch her*: Sonia Rodriguez.

Turgenev play of the same title. Instead, Ashton suggests a romantic idyll that remains a sorry substitute for physical passion. It’s all very prettified and elegant, but we don’t really sense the fire underneath.

There are three elegant and rhapsodic pas de deux set to ravishing Chopin music. Two of these are danced to perfection by Greta Hodgkinson and Guillaume Côté as the mistress of the house and her would-be lover. Côté also superbly dances a dramatic moment of confession and desire with Lobanova’s Olga, the family ward.

One of the National Ballets’ most skillful dancers, Côté has his usual difficulty expressing deeper dramatic meaning here, substituting charm, yearning, and a look of earnest concern for darker emotions. Never mind, in this case it’s enough. Anyone who looks this good in form-fitting trousers and tapered Cossack shirts can be forgiven almost anything.

Hodgkinson offers cool assurance as Na-



talia, finding a deep well of sorrow at the center of this vain, but beautiful, woman. At later performances, Xiao Nan Yu gave a sweeter, warmer account of Natalia's lost youth and cry of the heart.

Some see the ballet as dated, or antique. In fact it isn't. It just comes at desperate feelings from a more genteel, less visceral place. It's been too long since The National Ballet danced Ashton's exquisite work and it ought to be programmed again, very soon.

*Watch her*, by Alberta choreographer Barton, was specifically created for The National and as a result it sits superbly on its dancers. Although there are several central roles for women, danced brilliantly by Sonia Rodriguez, Svetlana Lunkina and Jenna Savella, this is an ensemble piece that shows off everyone to fine advantage. Watching so many dancers moving with gorgeous synchronicity, yet always providing individual grace notes of meaning, is special indeed.

Barton's choreography, sometimes aggressive and visceral, yet always lyric and fascinating, has hidden secrets. Arms are used brilliantly and Barton's sudden, tight steps against the sweep and resonance of Lera Auerbach's Dialogues on Stabat Mater, after Pergolesi, are thrilling.

## Miami

Michael Langlois

If we married Kenneth MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet* and Garry Marshall's *Happy Days*, the sitcom about 1950s America, presumably we would have a child that looks something like *West Side Story Suite*, the concert version from Jerome Robbins' *Broadway* (1989) of his 1957 musical (choreographed with Peter Gennaro) that Robbins restaged for New York City Ballet in 1995. Yes, that's a mouthful, but there are a mouthful of problems with this twice-removed distillation of *West Side Story*, as performed at Miami City Ballet.

Let's start with the most obvious problem: time. And by *time* I mean not simply the fifty-seven years that separate *West Side Story*'s pre-



Photo: Daniel Acuña, Miami City Ballet

*Episodes*: Patricia Delgado.

miere from present day, but also the time it takes to seduce today's viewer into believing in characters who act and dress and dance in a fashion that already would have appeared quaint three decades ago.

It might be difficult, even under normal circumstances, to buy into a bunch of pretty-boy gang members wearing Keds and T-shirts. Or mimed violence made manifest by ballet dancers during an era of mixed martial arts and *Game of Thrones*. Or odd discrepancies between dancers who occasionally sing in character via microphone like today's Broadway performers, but then suddenly and mysteriously *don't* (while some disembodied voice that is meant to be *them* rises from who-knows-where). But if we then add the lack of plot development and *time* to suspend one's 2014 disbelief in a 1950s turf war waged by assorted alumni of The School of American ballet, then the whole endeavor becomes a parody.

How can we genuinely feel for Tony and Maria or their plight when their romance is reduced to a speed date at Johnny Rockets? Where MacMillan's *Romeo* continues to challenge both dancer and viewer, Robbins' modern-day version of this tragic love story appears hopelessly dated. What might have seemed racy choreographically or conceptually in 1957 simply isn't anymore. We've seen too much. We've lived through too much. And dance – even Broadway dance – has come a long, long way in fifty years.

On a less bitchy note, the dancers of Miami City Ballet threw themselves into this period piece and it was exciting to witness their transformation into actors and singers. The audience in Miami seemed to find *WSSS* as rewarding as MCB's marketing department seemed to want them to so, my opinion aside, I think it's safe to say it was a success.

What was truly revelatory on this program was Balanchine's brilliant 1959 black-and-white ballet, *Episodes*, a work created two years after *Agon* and thirteen years after *The Four Temperaments*. Set to a score by Anton Webern, *Episodes* toys with the distinction between humanity and mechanization, between turning *in* and turning *out*, between flexion and extension, up and down, black and white, flat and on pointe.

*Episodes* is a conversation between seemingly disparate ideas in much the same way that Webern's twelve-tone music is a conversation about the hierarchical nature of music and the tension between an ordered tonal universe with prescribed rules for behavior and something else that appears quite radical but is, in fact, simply a different order with its own rules of behavior.

At one moment *Episodes* seems to be all about angularity and geometric planes, but in an instant that conceit explodes into something animalistic, pornographic, anarchic. Woman is manipulated, twisted, bound, spread open, pierced. Balanchine was nothing if not obsessed with women and in *Episodes* he takes that obsession and turns it inside out, showing us a kaleidoscope of her attitudes: dominant and submissive, powerful and frail, coy and impudent.

These black-and-white Balanchine babes, with their endless legs, thrusting crotches, and dainty little black belts cinched tight around their nothing waists, hair pulled high and tight to magnify the angularity of their faces, they are smoking hot and oh-so-eternally aloof that you can only dream of possessing them. And dream you will because that's what Balanchine did and that's what he wanted us to do.

## Toronto

Gary Smith

How smart to have Evan McKie from Stuttgart Ballet perform the role of Lensky in The National Ballet of Canada's beautifully staged production of *Onegin*. McKie's presence in this Cranko masterwork gave the entire company something to aspire to. With his pure, clean line and strong technique, he is the master danseur noble of his generation. A visceral Romeo, an elegant Siegfried, and a dark and haunting Onegin, McKie has the talents of a dazzling dancer as well as an astute actor.

McKie's Lensky was light as air, peppered with quicksilver turns and airborne flights of fancy. It was dramatically shaded and gently nuanced. There was sincere pain and fear in his duel scene. It was a performance that adhered to the technical demands of the role, but soared far beyond such necessities.

Not everything, however, was perfect in the National's production. Some casting choices did not allow the ballet's drama to unfold perfectly. McGee Maddox has an earnest manner and attractive stage presence. He's an intelligent and thoughtful actor. What he isn't, at least at this moment, is a perfect Onegin. Maddox hasn't the capacity for exploring the dark soul of such a committed narcissist. He misses the smug assurance and polished élan that make Onegin both seductive and lethal.

In the mirror pas de deux, for instance, Maddox doesn't become the fantasy of Tatiana's dreams. This is essential for the sexual context of Cranko's ballet to work perfectly. We must know Tatiana is besotted with her vision of Onegin. What we see of him when he leaps through her bedroom mirror must be Tatiana's dream image, the fantasy of Onegin she holds in her heart. We must feel her inner fire burning, her heart thumping. For that to happen it's essential we have an Onegin who inspires a necessary whiff of perfumed romance, as well as lusty obsession.

Maddox is excellent in the final scene when he returns to Tatiana many years later, a broken man. With his heart in his hand and his

desire very obvious he is now everything she lusted after in her youth. A strong partner, Maddox manages Cranko's difficult lifts and sudden shifts of weight and balance. In the final scene he finds the fear and longing of a man who has squandered love, living for the superficial.

Xiao Nan Yu does not come to the role of Tatiana easily. Her first appearance is young and girlish. She is believable reading her romantic book in Madame Larina's lovely garden. As she stretches on the grass she dreams of passionate encounters. Yet, when she meets the handsome and elegant Onegin, this Tatiana looks pained and upset. She substitutes an anguished look for acting. It doesn't work. This aspect remains throughout the ballet's party scene that follows, so we can't believe she has even a whisper of lust for this man in his handsome coat and formfitting tights.

Later, in the mirror scene, she dances prettily with the figure of Onegin that passes through her gilded mirror. But where is the real surrender? What we see is far too innocent. The dancing is pristine. But where is the passion? Shouldn't there be passion? Isn't this dance about rapturous surrender?

At a later performance, Greta Hodgkinson found precisely the fire necessary to make Tatiana more than a lovesick child. In the Mirror Pas de Deux, Hodgkinson melted into her imagined lover's arms, as if being enfolded by his masculinity was more than a dream. In the final act pas de deux with her husband Prince Gremin, nicely played by Etienne Lavigne, Hodgkinson was the dutiful and loving wife. Her Tatiana had settled for a more comfortable, less troubled kind of love.

When she was suddenly confronted by her old dream of a lover, the older, still desperately handsome Onegin, she struggled not to melt into his arms. We knew how much her old dream had died hard. We knew the fight inside, struggling to resist temptation, yet longing to give in to her fantasy come alive.

Hodgkinson balanced these emotions brilliantly, keeping us on the edge of our seats, fearing, yet hoping, she might not be strong

enough to resist. She made us believe for a terrible moment she might throw away everything. When she ripped up the love letter Onegin had given her, she pressed its tiny pieces into his hand, breaking his heart and her own.

Hodgkinson has developed such stunning acting powers that everything combines here to create a Tatiana of enormous range and passion. You are reminded of Ekaterina Maximova's lethal performance, as well as that of Natalia Makarova, dance actresses capable of bringing a role brilliantly to life. Her Onegin, the handsome, always easy to watch Guillaume Côté, did a fine job of telegraphing the man's weakness and arrogance. Trouble is, Côté is just too boyish to convince us of Onegin's darker soul.

Neither Alejandra Perez-Gomez, nor Rebekah Rimsay dance Madame Larina with the authority Victoria Bertram once brought to this role. Real character artists can't be made from mere dancers. Thankfully there is still Lorna Geddes to give a nuanced take on Tatiana's lovesick old nurse. Performances such as this one need to be cherished.

Both Jillian Vanstone and Elena Lobsanova, alternating as Olga, Tatiana's sister, were fine. Each danced with radiant warmth, but neither found the sadness in the dueling scene. The National's young corps de ballet danced with energy, technique, and wonderful exuberance, giving this *Onegin* essential spirit. At later performances Naoya Ebe danced Lensky well, but he failed to allow the dramatic underpinnings of the character to register.

The by now familiar new designs by Santo Loquasto, with birch trees everywhere, are appealing enough though they drive the eye upward away from the dance. And Tatiana's bedroom is too busy with furniture and flowers. The important mirror, which acts as the conduit to the dream man Onegin, looks more like a doorway.

Let's hope The National Ballet does this Cranko work again – and soon. Hodgkinson needs to have an opportunity to perform Tatiana again, before it's too late. And wouldn't

it be lovely to have McKie back, this time in the title role? That way Toronto could see what Paris Opera Ballet and Stuttgart Ballet audiences have been raving about.

## Salt Lake City

Leigh Witchel

Like a city restoring an old church and throwing in a few extra carvings for good measure, Ballet West revisited its history for its fiftieth anniversary season, but added a little extra gilt and polish. Willam Christensen's version of *The Firebird* made its debut in 1967 when the company was still Utah Civic Ballet; it became Ballet West the following year. The work was revived by Bruce Caldwell, a current ballet master who danced the part of the hero Ivan Tsarevich, and the company's original ballet mistress, Bené Arnold, with some changes that she felt were in furtherance of Christensen's wishes. Lush costumes according to designs by Ronald Crosby were finally realized by David Heuvel, and the princesses, who once danced in soft slippers, were now on pointe.

Ronald Crosby's original scenic conceptions were more naturalistic than Alexandre Golovine's for Fokine, but still placed us in an oriental fantasy: the spires and onion domes of the city peeked out through the distance. Statues – knights petrified by Kostchei – lined both sides of the stage. At the same time the production felt like the era of its creation: the 1960s. The first scene for the princesses was a shampoo commercial as they continuously ran their fingers through their long hair; the coronation crowns came from a margarine ad.

Christopher Ruud's father, Tomm, also danced the role of Ivan Tsarevich, and the son is just as beloved by the audience in Salt Lake City. Here he was a Grade A ham, doing vivid, almost silent-movie emoting. In another cast, Rex Tilton played Ivan callow and without irony.

Beckanne Sisk, a young dancer on a quick rise in the company, had to pinch-hit several times that weekend. She danced her own and

another dancer's performances of *The Firebird* with clean precision: birdlike on her first entry, with oblique glances and turned-in passés. But when she stopped before leaving, remembered something and gave Tilton the magic feather, it was a flash of human personality. Katherine Lawrence played the character as more feral; she kept a nervous animal distance from Ruud even as she bowed to him when summoned.

Christensen's monsters wear monkey and Chinese-influenced lion/dog masks. Kostchei is human, but with a fake nose and long, metallic nails. Beau Pearson relished the opportunity to play a costumed villain. His cruelty was carefully considered: a dangerous stroke across Rex Tilton's cheek with a sharp nail. It's wasn't frightening, rather it was effective in the same way as an adventure serial – you knew Ivan was in the den of the bad guys.

Kostchei didn't capitulate immediately when the Firebird appeared. He tried first to capture her, but she was too powerful, and she pacified the monsters with a slow suspended turn in arabesque. Christensen compressed the action slightly to fit Stravinsky's 1945 suite, putting the breaking of the egg containing Kostchei's soul in an abbreviated form at the end of the Berceuse.

The stone knights reanimated, and the curtain descended briefly to ready for the coro-



*The Firebird*: Katherine Lawrence and Christopher Ruud.

Photo: Luke Isler, Ballet West

nation and the return of the princesses in their new costumes of brocaded finery. The Firebird leapt across the diagonal to bless the union, and Ruud worked his cape at the curtain call.

Christensen's vision was both historical and practical. He was bringing the ballet to a new company, and made a straightforward adaptation of Fokine's original, with a few of his own touches. Although Balanchine pares out far more, you can see similar moments in both his version and Christensen's, such as when the Firebird was pulled back in bourrées by Ivan, yet reached away – an echo of common ancestry to the Fokine.

Ballet West has recently achieved some celebrity for its participation in the reality television series *Breaking Pointe*. Several of the company's dancers, such as Tilton, Sisk, and Ruud, are familiar faces from it, but there are also some particularly fine dancers not followed by the show, among them Arolyn Williams. In a clean, musical production of *Who Cares?*, Williams shared Patricia McBride's role with Christiana Bennett. Williams, like McBride, is smaller and gamine, but she invested the role with subtle, mature sensuality. Her "Fascinatin' Rhythm" teased the audience with sharp timing and footwork; in "The Man I Love," she was smitten with Pearson as in a Broadway musical.

Bennett colored the duet a slightly darker shade, resisting Christopher Sellars as he pulled her back, as if hesitant that this was a good idea – an echo of the Firebird. Bennett played with the music, syncopating unself-consciously, and translated her tall stature into strength in fearless chaîné turns swinging into arabesque.

As for the men, Pearson looks like a deer in headlights in classical roles – as if he still doesn't believe that he's a ballet dancer. His shining moment was a goofball "Liza" where he could use that what-am-I-doing-here quality and turn it into a character. Sellars had an amiable style that married Broadway looseness with cleanly placed technique, snapping his turns neatly on the beat.

Salt Lake City is a musical town, and the performance was enhanced by strong accompaniment from the Utah Chamber Orchestra.

## Stuttgart

Gary Smith

Making Shakespeare dance isn't easy. Just ask Alexei Ratmansky. His *Romeo and Juliet* for The National Ballet of Canada interpolates folk dance and fussy footwork. It's too much about dance when it should be about drama. As a result the tale turns on passionless storytelling.

Where is the power of Shakespeare's story? Missing in meaningless motion. It's not just enough to make steps. Something must propel choreographic invention if the story is going to be told. So, you can't dance Shakespeare, right? Yes, you can. That's where storytelling choreographers such as John Cranko and John Neumeier come in.

Take two of their successful ballets based on the works of Shakespeare: *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Othello*. Each dance, but they dance with meaning – not just steps. Each of these works, danced by the Stuttgart Ballet, brings Shakespeare to life. Each choreographer allows his characters to move in dramatic and interesting ways. The way they move always tells the story.

*The Taming of the Shrew* is that rare thing – a comic ballet. Judging by how few of these there are, you wonder if a story ballet can truly turn on a comic point of view. Well, it can. Ashton's *La Fille Mal Gardée* comes instantly to mind. It is arguably the best example of a ballet with humor at its core. It's funny, sweet and deliberately romantic. The comedy is so entrenched in character and movement that the story tells itself.

In *Shrew*, Cranko employs the same device to give the comedy important edge in that story of shrewish Katharina and determined Petruchio. That he does so, without sacrificing the darker aspects of Shakespeare's play, is astounding. *Shrew* works as a ballet because Cranko doesn't sacrifice character, or story, in exchange for show-off steps. The ballet re-

mains fixed on its powerful, central characters. No attempt is made to soften Kate's acerbic personality. No attempt is made to make Petruchio a soft and simple suitor.

In the choreography, Cranko makes it clear these are magnificent equals. No matter how much Petruchio attempts to destroy Katharina's will, we like him. Similarly, Katharina may appear to be an aggressive man-hater, but we know underneath she has a heart that longs for romantic salvation.

Feminists decry Shakespeare's play and denigrate Cranko's ballet, suggesting these works present a cruel portrait of a woman forced to humble herself for a man. But Cranko's contention, as with Shakespeare's play, is that these two giants are equal adversaries. That's why when the drama ends we know they're going to be fabulous lovers. She is "conquered" only because she lets Petruchio think he has bested her. In this way, Cranko has created a ballet that serves the story's every intention.

In Stuttgart's performances of *Shrew* this season Sue Jin Kang and Alicia Amatriain made Kate quiver with expectation, bristle with

used the sexual fire of Cranko's pas de deux to make the audience and Petruchio realize she is a match for anything. Dancing with recently retired Filip Barankiewicz, Kang ignited the stage. For his part Barankiewicz proved he could still dance this acting role with truth and physical commitment. A handsome Petruchio, the glint in his eye always let us know he had no intention of losing this sexual tug-of-war.

Alexander Jones, young and virile, gave the same role a sexy point of view. Having enormous fun throughout, he treated the ballet as if it were a romp. His Katharina, that incredible spitfire Alicia Amatriain, matched him step for step, grin for grin, snarl for snarl. She lived inside the skin of this force of nature and the ballet reached fever pitch when she tore into the confrontation scenes like some feisty fighter facing glory in a Latin bullring.

*Othello* is another matter altogether. Deep, dark, filled with foreboding, the ballet, like the play, quivers with danger. In the choreography John Neumeier never shies from the evil at the center of the work. In his penetrating dance version he allows jealousy, deception, and desire to overrule trust and common sense. As in Shakespeare's play, the wicked Iago schemes with such villainous hatred that the trusting heart of Othello is bruised beyond recognition.

Like the play, the ballet turns on Iago's evil control. Evan McKie dances the character's dark heart with such icy threat that the drama enfolds the audience in a cloak of wickedness. McKie is the kind of dancer who strips away flesh and sinew, revealing the white glint of bone. Here, he presents a mask of physical beauty, juxtaposed with a black soul and heart. The evil machinations here come from a very real and honest place. McKie's elegant frame moves like quicksilver, so the exterior is fascinating even when we realize the soul inside is withered and diseased.

As the duped Othello, Jason Reilly has such masterly control of movement he makes us understand the reason this man is loved and

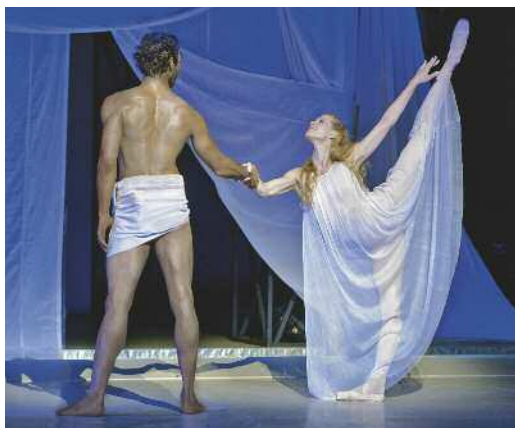


Photo: Bernd Wassbrodt, Stuttgart Ballet

*Othello*: Alicia Amatriain and Jason Reilly.

rage, and ultimately suggest deep-seated desire. Each performer danced the role in a similar, yet very different way. Kang found a softness at the center that lurks behind every thrust and jab. She attacked the choreography, but she always found the heartbeat of the character. She made Katharina human. Kang

trusted by his peers. There is such authority about Reilly's Moor that when he is brought down by Iago, we weep for him. Reilly moves with panther-like grace. He always emphasises the character's otherness. He uses physicality to suggest masculine, visceral passion so the emotional context of the role always provides the underpinnings of the dance.

At the very heart of this fearsome melodrama, Alicia Amatriain folds herself into the arms of fate. She is the greatest dance actress of her age. Amatriain never embroiders a character with surface filigree, always choosing to act her roles from the inside out. Her beautiful, elongated movement, stretched arms, and powerful emotional undertow make this faithful recreation of Shakespeare's most tragic love of all truthful.

Making Shakespeare dance may not be easy but when the strings of creation are tugged by the likes of Cranko and Neumeier, the plays live in terms of choreographed movement. The dance is an ally in the telling of the tale. Never is it just movement to be clever or noticed. That's why it works so well. That's why it finds every shade and nuance without benefit of words. You can dance to Shakespeare as long as you're given the right steps. It is poetry in the purest form.

## London

Larry Kaplan

Christopher Wheeldon's generally absorbing adaption of Shakespeare's romance *The Winter's Tale* set to a varied and imaginative score by Joby Talbot showcases the gifts of several Royal Ballet principals, Edward Watson (Leontes), Lauren Cuthbertson (Hermione), Zanaïda Yanowsky (Paulina), and Sarah Lamb (Perdita). But no one in the ballet comes off better than Steven McRae (Florizel), de facto the young romantic lead. McRae's sunny countenance, his open, harmonious line, and his easy command of the stage signal the shift in act 2 from the constricted atmosphere of Sicily, and Leontes' warped psyche, to the



Photo: Johan Persson, Royal Ballet

*The Winter's Tale*: Steven McRae.

brimming joy of youth and romantic love that's rampant in Bohemia.

In the sections set in Leontes' court, permutations of plot give Wheeldon a structure onto which to hang movement – literal, constricted choreography that establishes character and moves along the ballet's convoluted narrative. But in act 2's Bohemia, McRae's breezy self-assurance and his accomplished technique combine with Wheeldon's lighter inventions to lift the ballet into the realm of pure dance.

The material for Florizel and Perdita who lead an ensemble here is a kind of folk and character dancing. Steps flirt continually with becoming classical choreography but never quite get there, even though for a brief moment we think we might be watching *Le Corsaire*. Overall it's pleasing and enjoyable, a welcome contrast to the clotted dance moves that dominate the ballet's outer acts.

McRae's dancing brightens the proceedings throughout. He flies around the stage in arching turns and soaring jumps, and in his double work with Lamb he uses the lightest touch for their semi-acrobatic lifts and promenades. It's like he's made of air: standing still music flows out to us through his upper body, arms, shoulders, eyes, and head. What's most appealing is that McRae seems to be one of those dancers about whom you feel he's only showing a part of what he can do –

he has hidden reserves of power to dazzle the senses he'd be happy to demonstrate when the choreography calls for it.

## Chicago

Joseph Houseal

It was a great time for period performance in early March, with a perfect storm of professional expertise in music, staging, gesture, rhetoric, dance, set, costume, architecture, and hair.

How many times do we see the architecture and hair working together? The hair was amazing, each character with a distinct seventeenth-century hairstyle. Even the men's hair looked wonderful cascading in black locks. The beautiful artistry of the hair styling is an indication of how much attention to detail was put into this Haymarket Opera Company production of Marc-Antoine Charpentier's 1683 entertainment in two parts, *La Petite Pastorale* or *Le Jugement de Pan*, a divertissement, plus *Actéon Pastorale en Musique*.

The whole thing is a big laugh but only works as a folly if all the precise mannerisms and musical idiosyncracies are mastered. It is a gorgeous excuse for beautiful music. Ultimately Actéon will go bear hunting and that will lead him to spy on Diana bathing, and poor handsome Actéon, what a way to go. He turns into a stag, just as Ovid describes, and is hunted and killed by Diana's huntress followers.

As the lights come up on the lovely mobile multipaneled set designed by Academy of Rome fellow architect David Mayernik, an eight-piece orchestra begins playing on authentic period instruments. In this intimate opera house setting, the sounds, volumes, and dynamics of seventeenth-century music transport us. Then like a beach ball out of control, a large galumphing bear comes tearing through the audience and across the stage, patently ridiculous, a shadow of things to come.

What next but two shepherds arguing about who could sing better, and getting the half-goat god Pan to judge them. So begins again

one of the oldest tropes in Western art: mortals competing under the judgment of a god. Pan, considered the god of theatrical criticism, is the shirtless athlete Eric Miranda, with a bottom half a perfectly construed set of hind legs, complete with fur and hooves.

Pan suggests they are not up to singing about Louis XIV, and should set their sights on conquests of love. What follows is a sensitivity contest between shepherds in front of a satyr making fun of them. Very well sung (indeed all about superlative vocal performances), the good humor never lost, and the dance that they break into always near.

The small ensemble featured some of the very best working in baroque performance in the world – each as admirable as the next. What a group! Creatively and interpretively, Haymarket delivers a synthesis of top talent. There really is not space to discuss at length the achievements of each of these artists, but let me name them here briefly.

Craig Trompeter is the general director and music director of the company now in its third season. Ellen Hargis is a globally recognized authority on baroque gesture and rhetoric. She has performed as a soprano with the Mark Morris Dance Group and is also codirector of The Newberry Consort, which, in early February, performed an exact musical reconstruction of a fifteenth-century French feast entertainment, with a scholarly and beautiful audiovisual show in a cathedral.

Baroque dancer, scholar, and choreographer Sarah Edgar brings a European education in baroque dance and music to an international career in baroque performance. The two working together created a seamless, complete, and authentic style of moving, standing still, dancing, and being on stage. It was true to the age: Dance was like sword fighting and everyone fought. Dance was like society presentation and everyone was being presented in society. The dance was of a piece with the highly formal, gestural vocabulary and manners of their lives. Here, the dance rose from the action and returned back into it. Perfect. How often does a stage director with expertise in





Photo: Charles Osgood, Haymarket Opera Company

Haymarket Opera Company.

baroque rhetoric and gesture work with a world expert in baroque dance? More often now, we hope.

Meriem Bahri designed the costumes, each a different one, no two alike. This is an artist who loves her work. Self-taught, she has worked with many dance groups and one other period performance company in Europe. Her upcoming gig with Elements Contemporary Ballet's *The Sun King*, is due in the fall. These costumes looked like everyday clothes unless whimsy was called for. The movement looked like everyday life. The singing was too good to be true. The set was clever, a real baroque contraption equaling whatever universe was needed.

It isn't fair that the hair and wig artist Samantha Umstead did not get a bio like all the other creative artists. The hair was flawless. My kabuki teacher in Kyoto years ago used to say about the perfection of mastering a dance: it isn't finished until it has a bow on it. In this truly incredible baroque performance, Ms. Umstead put the bow on it.

The cast included the sophisticated British countertenor Biraj Barkakaty and the early music specialist and in-demand evangelist of Bach oratorios, Swedish tenor Olof Lilja, who carried both the opening farce and the following faux tragedy where he, as Actéon, is killed by the followers of Diana for seeing them nude. My favorite musical section of the opera is when the goddess and her arrow-cleaning

followers lament the tragic loss of the dead, handsome man. And in his prime, too. . . . The irony of the scene can get lost in the sheer sadness and beauty of the music.

The women's singing was all clear and full of wit and bounce. In particular, soprano Alexandra Olsavsky delivered a refined and detailed dramatic performance without ever over-playing her part. In fact, no one overplayed their part, or made a joke too broad. Great singing ensconced in a silly but still artistically rich story. There is ample opportunity for too much in a reconstructed entertainment such as this.

Baroque opera was a balance of the arts. Modernity leaking into it with missing expertise in one or another aspect of performance, modifies if not threatens, this balance. Dance and movement are routinely the weak link in modern productions. Not here. They were the strength upholding the entire work. Haymarket reached a zenith of skill, polish, and entertainment in authentic baroque style, which is to say it was perfectly calibrated.

The significance of making all this magical cannot be underestimated. One of the sons of the wealthy Chicago Pritzker family bought a Frank Lloyd Wright house in a rundown neighborhood, fixed it up, and declared it a foundation. Then he bought a derelict old show theater and bar built in the 1920s, the Mayne Theater. He restored the whole thing, including a rebuild of the entirely wooden two-hundred-seat, horseshoe-shaped theater. Guests sit at tables for two on the orchestra floor. The lower horseshoe is rimmed with tables for two, and an upper horseshoe balcony has tables for four rimming the rail. It is a beautiful little opera house where you can also eat before or after, and drink during the performances. Ideal for baroque opera.

The singers and musicians were not amplified, and the delicate style created among them was everywhere to be appreciated. Last year, the Pritzker scion made arrangements for The Haymarket Opera to be a resident company at the Mayne, which has a regular roster of musical acts of all stripes. Some people

come just for the bar and restaurant. It is about three blocks from my apartment. I never thought I would live to see the day when a baroque opera company – a rather amazing one – would be resident in a little wooden theater in our lakeside neighborhood. What more does any person want from life?

## New York

Alexandra Villarreal

Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo's *LAC* ambitiously combines sex, intrigue, eclectic choreography, and proficient dancing that nevertheless leaves audience members hungry for substance as they exit the auditorium.

Over the past two decades, choreographers seem to agree that Petipa's story ballets require revisions to remain pertinent to the twenty-first century. Vladimir Derevianko has his *Giselle* (2000) and Matthew Bourne just completed his highly celebrated Tchaikovsky trilogy with *Sleeping Beauty* (2012).

Interestingly, artists are too invested in the fairytale landscape to let go of the classics completely. One might ask, given the misogyny and prejudice in these stories, what qualities inspire choreographers to nostalgically reincarnate fables from the past. One might also wonder how exactly taking ballerinas off pointe or replacing their tutus with skirts makes movement modern. But these are questions for another day.

For now, the attention must fall on Jean-Christophe Maillot, artistic director of the Monte-Carlo company, and *LAC*, his rendition of *Swan Lake*. After a ten-year creative process that aimed to make the narrative more relatable for a contemporary audience, Maillot premiered his work in 2011 and recently presented it here at City Center.

Maillot exists in the shadow of the mastermind behind one of the greatest balletic endeavors in history, Sergei Diaghilev, and his Ballets Russes. Based in Monaco, the old Ballets Russes satisfied its sponsor's affinity for the exotic and sexy, and with repertory like Nijinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, the

company relished its shock value and the promise of spectacle.

As Monaco's first successful ballet troupe since the Ballets Russes, Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo almost has a responsibility to entertain its public with delusions of grandeur. Perhaps this is why Maillot's *LAC* falls flat. In an attempt to dazzle viewers with eye candy, the ballet loses what imbues Petipa's interpretation with beauty: compelling, clean choreography that evokes a purity that is absent in the daily grind outside of the theater.

To reimagine *Swan Lake* with a trendier plot, Maillot collaborated with writer and Prix Goncourt winner Jean Rouaud to isolate the iconic from the forgettable in the original tale and to add twists and turns that might surprise even the most well-versed ballet aficionado. The result is a love story that is more reminiscent of a soap opera than any amorous encounter from real life. While it retains some of the magical realism from its previous form, it becomes so contorted and exaggerated that it is more comparable to a trashy airport romance than a masterpiece for posterity.

Naturally, when Maillot edited the storyline, he also altered the order of the ballet. The ball scene is plopped into act 1, Tchaikovsky's score is interspersed randomly with "additional music" by Bertrand Maillot, and the dancing is rudely interrupted by sporadic special effects seemingly for glamour's sake.



*LAC*: Mimoza Koike and Alvaro Prieto.

Photo: Doug Gifford, Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo

Everything is re-envisioned, and frankly, it's done rather poorly.

LAC opens with a prologue that incorporates film into the mix of the many mediums Mailliot implements to bring Odette and Siegfried to life. Shot in black-and-white, the artsy footage feels like it's trying hard to assert the interrelation and mutualism between dance and other genres of expression. Children run around teasing each other while the King, Queen, and Her Majesty of the Night (Rothbart's parallel) supervise. Enraged when Siegfried shows more affection for Odette than Odile, Her Majesty of the Night kidnaps the young Odette and morphs her into the White Swan. After the projection concludes, the screen billows to the ground in an aesthetically pleasing manner that cannot distract from how cliché Mailliot's vision appears already.

Then, Mailliot proceeds with a court scene that is more like a confused orgy. The Pretenders throw themselves at Siegfried while he refuses their advances. Especially sensuous is the Voracious one, played by Gaëlle Riou, who is, not so coincidentally, the most curvaceous dancer in the fifty-person company. Riou is stunning, passionate, and incredibly capable, but all of her skill is hidden behind a red dress and a siren facade that give her few liberties to showcase her ability.

Interspersed between butt slaps and crude caresses are several ensemble pieces that are altogether not terrible. They are dominated by Siegfried (Stephan Bourgond) and his friends the Hunters, and the choreography is hardly noteworthy (it alludes to Jerome Robbins' *Fancy Free* and *West Side Story*), with carefree runs and pelvic thrusts that somehow seamlessly transition into cabrioles and other classical steps. However, it is a pleasure to watch a high-flying, charismatic male corps that is also technically proficient.

But the saving grace of the first act of LAC is Mimoza Koike, who plays the Queen. Marital tensions between the royal couple, some of which revolve around the King's affair with her Majesty of the Night, are a major subtheme

in LAC. Therefore, the Queen is painted as a complex character, and Koike portrays her as an independent, strong woman who will not be defeated by her husband's infidelity. With sustained arabesques as well as determined footwork, Koike is a force to be reckoned with. Her solos are worth sitting through the lewd and degrading pas de trois.

Maude Sabourin also has immense control, restraint, and attack within her actions as Her Majesty of the Night, although unfortunately her choreography is too gimmicky and her costume too distracting for viewers to concentrate on her capacity.

Act 2 introduces Odette, and though at moments the production still feels cheap, it is at least more lovely and fluid. In the White Swan pas de deux, Anja Behrend is truly ethereal as she swirls in neoclassical lifts and turns. Her never-ending lines are poetry in themselves; she would look equally masterful and majestic in whatever role or venue. Her costume, designed by Philippe Guillotel, is innovative, if overdone, and her feathered fingers make her limbs even longer, though they occasionally break the clarity of her gestures.

Unlike Petipa, Mailliot does allow his Odette some joy, which gives her a much-needed second dimension. When Siegfried professes his love for Odette, Behrend hints at a smile, and as they dance together, the pair shares a child-like innocence and seems to be playing at love. Behrend battements and then Bourgond matches her. But she must not be defeated, and so she kicks a bit higher to win their competition. Though refreshing, this new Odette is in no way touching or poignant. She is still mystical and removed from humanity, and Behrend's lightness fosters a sense of perfection that alienates her White Swan from spectators.

The third act is more drama, more tricks, and more changes. There's very little dancing, but that's all right because multiple deaths and a whirling black sheet spice things up. A condensed version of the fourth act is tacked onto act 3, and when the ballet concludes, it fades away into ephemerality.

If Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo's *LAC* is intended to be lavish, it succeeds. If it's meant to be anything more, then any social commentary or depth was lost behind the sets, costumes, and scandal that would make Petipa roll in his grave. If it is true that Julius Reisinger's first *Swan Lake* was abhorred and reviled, then who knows? Perhaps Maillot's rendering has more redeeming values (other than its dancers) for another choreographer eventually to discover and investigate. But, for now, why try to fix what isn't broken? Classics endure for a reason, and, at least for Maillot, it's time to respect them for what they are and to find new topics to explore.

## San Francisco

Rachel Howard

San Francisco Ballet's men are known for their stylish classicism in contemporary works, but its women are not afforded as much opportunity to develop their individual chops. Much of the recent repertory asks the women to move like postmodern Slinkies (Christopher Wheeldon or Jorma Elo) or to be twisted by muscle men like Gumbies (Wayne McGregor or Liam Scarlett).

Despite its confectionery lightness, then, *Suite en Blanc*, created by Serge Lifar for the Paris Opera Ballet in 1943, has proven a significant repertory acquisition. In this fantasia, set to excerpts from Édouard Lalo's 1882 ballet *Namouna*, a large corps flanks a series of divertissements with Ziegfield Follies-like formations arrayed on an upstage terrace and opposing staircases.

The men do heavy duty, carrying the ladies on one shoulder, but they are more often just window dressing, tossing off double-tours on the sidelines while an unaccompanied

woman cavorts in the spotlight. In its second go at the ballet in the spring (following debut performances last year at home and on tour in New York), SFB took full possession of this staging, by Maina Gielgud.

It was especially satisfying to see several ballerinas who have grown out of the corps test their technique with panache. Sasha De Sola, now a soloist, began her career as a smiling blond cannonball of energy. In *Suite en Blanc*'s Pas de 3 (as in every other role she tackled this season) she danced with a confidence verging on vulgarity. Yet there was also great elegance in her arms held unusually to the side of the head, hands resting behind ears for the arabesques, and a beautiful stillness on her long soutenu balance.

Her cohort, soloist Dores André, is also a recent promotion, and is lately cast in just about everything because of her cheerful capability. Her romp through the castanet-accented Pas de 5, which is built on the allure of a wide, stretched second position in big jumps and echappés, was powered by muscular gymnast's legs.

Meanwhile, whether because of injury, or artistic director Helgi Tomasson's eagerness to develop young talent, corps member Koto Ishihara was thrust into the Serenade solo. Just three years out of the San Francisco Ballet School, she bobbed her fouettes in one small moment of nerves, but held a beautiful

line in her long attitude balances and really made a most admirable debut of it.

The company's greatest glory was claimed by its imported principals. Sarah Van Patten, recruited from the Royal Danish Ballet as a soloist while still in her teens, is SFB's resident Suzanne Farrell incarnation. Van Patten, partnered in the pas de deux by Tiit Helimets, made regality into something moral and soothing.



*Suite en Blanc*: Mathilde Froustey.

Photo: Erik Tomasson, San Francisco Ballet

The dancey-dance highlights went to Mathilde Froustey, hired last year from the Paris Opera Ballet, where she first learned the Cigarette solo. Now twenty-eight and seemingly at the height of her powers – how could she possibly be any better? – she astonished. Those long arms, so fluid, and the soft freedom in the shoulders creating a cat-like impression. Never have I seen a dancer combine such swift precision in the legs with such lush ease above. I especially remember her way of stepping right out of a pirouette into little hops on pointe, as light and easy as a laugh.

Crowning all was a principal dancer less fetishized than local box office darlings Yuan Yuan Tan and Maria Kochetkova: Sofiane Sylve. French, tall, broad-shouldered, never “pretty” but always womanly, Sylve was a prime wonder this season, unusually moving as Myrtha in *Giselle*, bringing bite to Wayne McGregor’s *Borderlands* and to *Agon*. In *Suite en Blanc*’s Flute solo, she seemed to be dancing for the thrill of the wind in her hair. Finishing one spinning circuit of the stage, she caught a final pique turn next to the wings, and I’d swear I saw her whiz through five rotations. She is femininity as sheer independence and power, never preening.

In the lobby after the performance, knowledgeable observers admired the dancing, but scoffed at the ballet as shamelessly “pretty.” I don’t understand this. Such shamelessness is so worn-on-the-sleeve that it becomes winking wit. The corps’ lateral profiles playing off the Egyptian flavor of Lalo’s music is intelligent fun. So is the extension of logic in the classroom’s classical dance language.

On seeing *Suite en Blanc*, it seemed not absurd to me that Balanchine was passed over as director of Paris Opera Ballet in favor of Lifar. Had I been a balletomane in that age, I might have placed my bet on Lifar, too.

## Miami

Michael Langlois

If Léon Minkus and Marius Petipa (with some questionable reediting from Alexander Gor-

sky) had concocted this paragraph the way they did the first act of *Don Quixote*, it would be printed on 145-year-old paper and I would be dressed in a sweaty old matador’s costume borrowed from the American Ballet Theatre warehouse back in New York! You would be reading it in English but mouthing the words with a fake Spanish accent while drinking sangria made by Carlo Rossi! [Applause]

An at the end of every sentence I would insert an exclamation point! Even if it’s not much of a sentence! And when I do this I will throw my hands in the air with impunity, saying, “Look at my wondrous prose! Pay no attention to how pedestrian it actually is!” [Applause]

Curtain. End of act 1. Intermission. I need a drink. And, no, I don’t care if the champagne is second-rate, the glasses are plastic, and it costs an arm and a leg.

It has been a long, long time since I’ve seen *Don Q* and it was definitely a happy-hour ballet for yours truly, even though it was only 2:45 p.m. So, as I drank my crappy, overpriced champagne and mused about Miami City Ballet’s portrayal of this classic tale, I could not help but recall the many performances I appeared in as a member of ABT back in the 1980s. Who could forget the fireworks of Gelsey and Misha, or Cynthia and Fernando, or Patrick Bissell and Cynthia Harvey, so the Miami City Ballet dancers will have to forgive me for comparing and contrasting.

Suffice it to say; the first act of this ancient production of *Don Q* with sets and costumes borrowed from ABT was a bit like attending the Mass Games in North Korea with Dennis Rodman and Kim Jong-un. As I stared incredulously at the absurdity of it all, marveling at the predictable climaxes and the predictable applause that invariably followed each predictable climax, I smiled. Such antediluvian charm.

There were no fewer than ten debuts in this final effort of Miami City Ballet’s season, and with all of those asterisks staring me in the face, and its being a matinee to boot, I was not terribly sanguine about the prospects. I was

won over, however, by the increasingly confident debuts of both Jennifer Lauren (Kitri) and Kleber Rebello (Basilio).

These dancers have technique big enough for the leads. Rebello, one of the many Brazilians who inhabit the ranks of MCB, is a soft, lyrical dancer who turns like a dreidel and surprises with his attack. He is a true gem and Miami is lucky to have him. He was a very subdued Basilio, however, whose characterization didn't make a terribly distinct impression. I think it's safe to say, however, that he



Photo: Leigh-Ann Esty, Miami City Ballet

*Don Quixote*: Jennifer Lauren and Kleber Rebello.

will develop into a stellar Basilio once he acquires some experience and more dramatic coaching.

Miami City Ballet, after all, has not typically been a repository of the "classics," and the finesse required for these roles to read to the back of house without becoming a burlesque requires tremendous confidence, skill, and, yes, coaching. This was what made Misha the remarkable Basilio, Albrecht, and so forth, that he was – not simply his ability to dance beautifully, but to convey a thought or an emotion to the farthest reaches of a theater the size of the Met.

Lauren, like Rebello, seemed a little uncertain about the dramatic aspects of her Kitri. She appeared rushed, and occasionally disconnected. The tiny interactions between the two lovers and the *hoi polloi* needed more dis-

tinction and nuance. It all matters. Every second. Every glance. Dancers sometimes forget this because from the stage a theater can seem so vast.

Now that my place is in the audience, I am all too aware of just how exposed Kitri is, particularly at the beginning of the ballet when we are trying to get a sense of who she is. As the afternoon wore on, however, Lauren's confidence seemed to grow and by the time she arrived at the altar in act 3, she tore through her variation and her *fouettés* (throwing in doubles as she pleased) as if she were vying for a gold medal at Varna.

As for the remainder of the cast, Carlos Miguel Guerra, portrayed the cape-wielding egomaniac known as Espada. He bulldozed his way through the choreography and the crowd with a startling array of odd grimaces more suited to a stress test at Mount Sinai Hospital. He needs to watch himself on video to cure himself of this habit. Jeremy Cox's turn as Gamache was a mincing, gay ambrosia so cloyingly queer I didn't know whether to be appalled or amused.

In act 2, Emily Bromberg, made her debut as Queen of the Dryads. She came up a bit short in the well-known variation that includes a series of *écartés* on pointe that flip into attitude *derrière*. Those glitches aside, it was nice to see her doing something substantial. With a bit more strength she'll be wonderful in this role. Sara Esty won the Joey Heatherton look-alike contest with her portrayal of *Amour*, flitting about the stage in her pixie white hair, casting a coke-addled air over every scene she touched. Delightful.

When all was said and done and Kitri and Basilio were riding off into a questionable matrimonial future (he is a hairdresser, after all) I walked outside into the perfect South Florida sunshine of my tropical homeland and realized I enjoyed this *Don Q* in spite of myself. Yes, it's terribly dated and silly, but there's still enough well-known and well-crafted choreography, and enough really fine dancing from this genuinely gifted troupe, to keep the old Spanish galleon afloat.